

आर्य जीवन

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ARYA PRATINIDHI SABHA A.P.-TELANGANA,
HYDERABAD.

मानवता व न्याय के लिए निरंतर लड़ने वाले
संघर्षशील योद्धा स्वामी अग्निवेश

The Right Livelihood Foundation mourns 2004 Laureate Swami Agnivesh



Swami Agnivesh : Credit: Wolfgang Schmidt

The Right Livelihood Foundation mourns the passing of 2004 Laureate **Swami Agnivesh**, who was a champion of religious and communal co-existence and tolerance in India and beyond. Agnivesh died at the age of 80 after a longer illness on Friday, 11th September, in New Delhi.

“Swami Agnivesh was a champion for the oppressed who sought to create unity through religious tolerance,” said Ole von Uexkull, Executive Director of the Right Livelihood Foundation. “His legacy remains a guiding light for communal co-existence at a time of widening social gaps and increasing extremism. We are deeply saddened by the passing of this extraordinary leader.”

“A compassionate champion for the most vulnerable, Agnivesh worked on a number of social issues, including child and bonded labour, the inclusion of Dalits in Indian religious society, women’s rights, and religious tolerance and reconciliation.

He was born as Vepa Shyam Rao on 21st September, 1939, into an orthodox Hindu family. After practising law and teaching, he gave up his career to work full time for the Arya Samaj, a Hindu reformist movement, in 1968. Two years later, he became a sanyasi, renouncing worldly possessions and becoming, in the process, Swami Agnivesh.

Parallel to becoming a “renouncer,” Agnivesh co-founded a political party, the Aryasabha, to work for political order, based on Arya Samaj principles. This set of principles was spelt out in a book published in 1974, Vaidik Samajvad (Vedic Socialism). It rejects the lop sided materialism of both capitalism and communism in favour of what the Arya Sabha constitution calls “social spirituality”.

When Prime Minister Indira Gandhi declared a state of emergency in 1975, cracking down on opposition parties, Agnivesh and some colleagues were arrested. He spent 14

months in prison. After the 1977 elections that swept Indira Gandhi from office, Agnivesh was elected to the Haryana state legislative assembly, being given the post of education minister. However, he rapidly became disillusioned, resigned and decided to devote all his energy and time to social justice movements.

During this period, he began to denounce bonded labour, which became one of his most emblematic causes. In 1981, he founded the Bandhua Mukti Morcha (BMM), the Bonded Labour Liberation Front, which has secured the release of more than 1,78,000 Indian workers, including 26,000 children. The organisation has also helped create a number of trade unions.

Besides bonded labour, Agnivesh campaigned to end hepractice of sati, the immolation of widows on their husband’s funeral pyres andalso fought to secure entry of Dalits into Hindu temples. He has participated in a number of people’s movements (including Narmada Bachao Andolan, which also received the Right Livelihood Award) regarding land, water, forests and fisheries issues.

In 1999, concerned about escalating religious fundamentalism and obscurantism, he helped to launch a multi-religious forum called Religions for Social Justice. After the 2002 massacre in Gujarat, he organised a group of 72 eminent religious-social leaders who spent five days in the violence-affected areas of Gujarat and denounced the Hindu fundamentalist organisations and sectors responsible.

In later years, he remained committed to promoting interfaith dialogue.

He received the 2004 Right Livelihood Award “for promoting over many years in South Asia the values of religious and communal co-existence, tolerance and mutual understanding.”



भारत के उपराष्ट्रपति

VICE-PRESIDENT OF INDIA

MESSAGE

I would like to convey my deepest condolences on the passing away of Swami Agnivesh. He has been a relentless crusader against bonded labour. He not only played an instrumental role in bringing freedom to many victims of forced labour but also created awareness against it through his campaigns. He strove for the emancipation of women and always worked with dedication for the causes in which he believed in.

May his soul rest in peace!

(M. Venkaiah Naidu)

WCC expresses sadness upon the demise of Swami Agnivesh

21st Sept. 2020

The World Council of Churches (WCC) expressed deep sorrow upon the demise of Swami Agnivesh, a longtime Hindu partner for the WCC, and offered its heartfelt condolences to grieving communities.

Swami Agnivesh was the president emeritus of the World Council of AryaSamaj (Savadeshik Arya Pratinidhi Sabha) and founder-chairperson of the Bonded Labour Liberation Front (Bandhua Mukti Morcha), an organisation he founded in 1981 to advocate for the rights of bonded labourers.

"In the demise of Swami Agnivesh we have lost a leader whose passion for justice showed the compassionate side of religion," said Rev. Prof. Dr. Loan Saucá, WCC Interim general secretary. "As a selfless and to release champion of justice for the poor and one of the leading proponents of inter religious dialogue from the Hindu community, he leaves behind a legacy that will inspire many to pursue peace between religions and justice for the poor."

"Swami Agnivesh also served as chairperson of the UN Trust Fund on Contemporary Forms of Slavery from 1994-2004. As recognition his ongoing (struggling) engagement to end bonded labour in India he was awarded the Right Livelihood Award (Alternative Nobel Peace Prize) in Sweden" and Freedom and Human Rights Award in Bern, Switzerland.

"For his outspoken views on growing religious fundamentalism Swami Agnivesh was attacked by a violent mob of alleged fringe fundamentalist group in July 2018. The attack on leader drew widespread condemnation across the globe, including from the WCC which viewed the attack as an infringement on the right to freedom of religion and expression, and a serious violation of basic human rights and dignity."

The WCC holds the followers of Swami Agnivesh and the communities he served in its thoughts at this time of bereavement and hopes that they will find the strength to persevere in Swami Agnivesh's path of religious harmony and peaceful coexistence.

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HUMBLE TRIBUTE TO SWAMI AGNIVESH

Swami Agnivesh ji was an outspoken personality having bold mental power and courage to fight against injustice. He was a crusader against bonded labour system, not only against bonded labour - child labour but against all social evils including the "Sati Pratha" or glorification of "Sati".

He worked tirelessly to combat the caste system, dogmatism, communalism etc. Being a true Arya Samaji and follower of Swami Dayanand Saraswati the founder of Arya Samaj, he was for just Justice with an unique ideology of "Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam". He was a staunch believer in "Yatra Vishwam Bhavatyek needam". He advocated that this planet is for all living beings without any discrimination. God created the human beings as human beings only without making any discrimination as caste, creed, religion, Hindu, Muslim, Christian etc. and this earth as boundaryless. All differences are by man made policies. He advocated to fight out all these menaces to make noble world and whole Earth as one family, "his words left indelible marks, and his courage was a true goad and an inspiration. He combined a spiritual and worldly presence in unique" ways. His spirituality evoked the very essence of the spiritual quest" for meaning but still more for justice and goodness. His humanity, his prophetic voice, his "example, his courage will not be forgotten."

Bringing out this memorable book is our humble tribute to Swami Agnivesh ji

- Vithal Rao Arya

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Swami Agnivesh

becomes the first Indian to receive

Hero of Humanity award

from Visioner's International Network

Swami Agnivesh who in critical condition currently battling a debilitating liver and multiple organ affected at ILBS, Vasant Kunj, New Delhi has been conferred upon the prestigious Hero of Humanity award by the Visioner's International Network. Swami Agnivesh who has relentlessly crusaded for the plight of the bonded and child labourers happens to be the first Indian to receive this honour, which has been bestowed upon luminaries like Florence Nightingale, Nina Meyerhoff, Tony Buzan, Robert Muller etc. The saffron clad social activist was attacked and beaten up by an orthodox right wing crowd in Pakur, Jharkhand two years ago and has been battling poor health since. His condition deteriorated in March and he has been hospitalized since.

The jury recognised his efforts for the most marginalized and the most voiceless and wrote- "We urgently pray for your recovery. We know that you do your work as a natural extension of who you are, without any expectation of reward, since the work itself and the outcome for its recipients is reward enough. At the same time, others, inspired by your example of the work itself, or healed by your ministries, internalize the ideas profoundly and extend the work beyond your knowledge by their own newfound ability and energy. In this way, you add to humanity's reservoir of human goodness. It is this human resource that the Visioners project is tapping into by showcasing the examples of yourself and others."

The jury further reiterated- We will showcase and celebrate your body of work on our Virtual Expo and in the Visioners Masterworks Emporium of the Great Works of Our Time, but this Award Certificate is for you, to tell you how much of an impact you are having and how much your work is appreciated. Put it in your home in a place of honour, so you can see every day how much, you, your work, and the spirit you bring to life is valued by your peers, friends and colleagues. It is meant to engender a secret smile and encourage you to continue.

Thank you for your service to humanity. We offer you the Visioners Lifetime Achievement Award as a Hero of Humanity."

ACCEPTANCE SPEECH – SWAMI AGNIVESH

It is imperative that a new and proactive spiritual vision commensurate to the challenges of the emerging world order be enunciated without delay.

Right Livelihood : A Universal Goal

Hon'ble Mr. Speaker and distinguished friends, I consider it a special privilege to be honoured through the Right Livelihood Award, respected globally as the "Alternate Nobel Prize".

I would like to thank the Right Livelihood Award Foundation for finding me worthy of this unique recognition.

I welcome this not just as a distinction conferred on me personally, but as a global recognition of a spiritual mission that I have had the privilege to share with people of many faiths and cultures over the last four decades specially with Islamic scholar activist Dr. Asghar Ali Engineer and a Christian priest of renown Rev. Valsan Thampu. Additionally, it is a tribute to the unique spiritual genius of India that breeds a composite culture of harmony and mutual respect. Sadly, this has come under assault from organized vested interests in recent times. But the soul of India spoke against it in decisive terms through the idiom of democracy recently. And I feel a sense of legitimate pride about the spiritual goodness of my people who have reasserted our shared spirituality and rejected parochial and sectarian agendas and advocacies.

I see this is an occasion to share with you, albeit briefly, the essence of my spiritual vision and mission. To me, the essence of spirituality is the duty to live to its full the glorious destiny of being human. The purpose of religion should be to

empower all people in this adventure of living with dignity and fulfilment. Sadly, the spiritual core of all religions has decayed and the competitive agendas



of ghettoized religious establishments have become a blatant contradiction of their spiritual mandate. Religions have become a hindrance, rather than a





help, to our shared pursuit of peace and progress. They tend to make us meaner rather than better human beings, less sensitive to the demands of justice, compassion and fellow humanity in our times. This is regrettable in the extreme.

Early enough in my spiritual pilgrimage it dawned on me that the ultimate value in this world is life in all its manifold forms and expressions. To

material advantages alone. Material advantages beyond basic needs tend to contribute to human unhappiness. It is the result of the right relationship between the Creator and the whole of creation. Spirituality defines, directs and empowers that relationship.

This explains why I attach special significance to this award among all the awards conferred on me.

that extent I want to emphasize that the focus on "right livelihood" needs to be centered on a commitment to value and celebrate life. Spiritually, life is a festival, a celebration. Joy is of the essence of life; and, as per the Indian spiritual worldview, joy is of the essence of God as well. The hallmark of God is ananda, or pure bliss. Because we carry, deep within us, the imprint of the nature of our Creator, all human beings have a right, and duty, to be joyful. Anything that thwarts this spiritual human right goes against the very purpose of human being. Spirituality mandates us to wage a relentless war to eradicate these forces of oppression and disempowerment. But joy is not merely a matter of obtaining some





To institute the "Right Livelihood Award" is to focus attention on a wholesome approach to spirituality as the foundation of life. I was born into an orthodox south Indian brahmin family, practicing a religion of multiple Gods & Goddesses, idol worship, caste system, a superstitious, ritual ridden way of life. At the age of 17, I came across the universal Vaidic spiritual vision of Maharshi Dayanand—The founder of Arya Samaj Movement in 1875. It demystified and simplified religion for me and inspired me to be my own prophet. Based on that vision, I want to place on record my spiritual conviction that the religions of the world must be assessed, not on the basis of their convoluted theologies, but in terms of the extent to which they serve as forces of liberation and empowerment. Religion as the watchdog of the status quo is a curse and a liability. It is high time we cast it out, lock stock and barrel. That being the case, and going by mounting contemporary evidence, I have no hesitation in stating that the agenda of "Right Livelihood" has two complementary dimensions. First, we must liberate people from religion, as religion is understood and practiced today. Second, we must effect a paradigm shift from religiosity to shared spirituality.

This agenda assumes unprecedented urgency and significance in a globalizing world. The retrograde and mutually antagonistic outlook of religions is a liability we have inherited from the era and mindset of nation states. In the fields of economics and politics, in internal relations and trans-national military enterprises, the global outlook has shifted from competition to cooperation. It is a matter of supreme irony that,

though the vision of globality was intuited first in the sphere of spirituality, the religions of the world shut their eyes willfully against its opportunities and challenges, thanks to their narrow and narcissistic dispositions.

The global village is shifting progressively from antagonism to alliances. This does not mean that peaceful coexistence will result automatically. Alliances can continue to be possessed by the spirit of antagonism and keep our world bleeding itself to death. Peace among religions is a precondition for world peace. But religions, as religions, can never be at peace with each other. To enable religions to be instruments for peace we need to enable, first, religious communities to progress from religion to spirituality.

For the world order to be one of peace and justice, for the global village to be a theater of right livelihood, it is imperative that a new and proactive spiritual vision commensurate to the challenges of the emerging world order be enunciated without delay. The challenge is to make "right livelihood" a universal goal. Recognizing this value in a symbolic way through an award like this is a significant step in the right direction. This is not, however, our journey's end. We must not rest until right livelihood is within reach of every human being upon this earth we love and cherish.

We all have a role to play in achieving this goal. Today, the world is a gog with a Global Alliance for War Against Terrorism and a re-elected born again Christian President of a superpower has hiked his country's military budget to a whopping 400 billion US dollars in the current climate.

Can we who are committed to Global Peace with justice call for a 10% reduction in all military spending worldwide? Such a reduction would make a staggering US\$100 billion a year available to provide millions of people the necessary amenities to lead a life of dignity, a life of Right Livelihood. Illiteracy, poverty and unemployment often create fertile breeding grounds for religious fundamentalism and eventual terrorism. One hundred billion dollars annually would make the difference to curb the spread of these influences. In addition to this, each one of us who wants to contribute to avoiding contributes to global inequity avoidable and injustice should be able to cut down on incremental 10% consumption of alcohol,





tobacco and meat. Let us unite for a Global Alliance for War Against Poverty and Exploitation and Contemporary Forms of Slavery. Let us launch a People's Movement for Right Livelihood. In all humility I offer myself and nearly one million members of Arya Samaj to work for such a movement.

In accepting this unique honour, I renew my pledge to continue my spiritual struggle against all forms and forces of oppression and exploitation, of irrationality and obscurantism, and to endeavour to cleanse the garden of life from the weeds of discrimination, alienation and antagonism. Universal kinship—the insight that we are all children of God, equally—is the quint essence of a spiritual vision. Today we pay lip service to this glorious truth. Let us walk hand-in-hand to make this a flesh and blood reality.

It is said that the birth of every human being is a God's statement of faith in the potential goodness of human life. I share this deep optimism about life. And it is my prayer that the global village will be a garden of life and not a wilderness of death, marked by hostility and destructiveness. I wish to conclude by saying a prayer that millions in my country have been saying from time immemorial:

Asatoma Sadgama,
(O Divine ! Lead us from untruth to Truth)

Tamasoma Jyotigama,
(from darkness and ignorance to light & wisdom)
Mrityorma Amritagama
(from disease & death to immortality).



My heart is overwhelmed

MY HEART IS OVER WHELMED at the passing away of my good friend Swami Agnivesh with whom I had privilege to work on many different projects through the many years in Delhi. We also founded the Sarvadharmas Sansad together. Even when I left Delhi and came to Austria, our relationship continued uninterrupted. Not only I went to visit him in his hotel but he came twice out to meet me in my place to see what type of place I was living and working at.

In 2015 when he visited my place on the suburbs of Vienna, he was deeply impressed that our center was housing nearly 300 refugees from Afghanistan, Syria, Iran and other African countries. He could hardly believe that a Christian center was housing men, women and children refugees, 99% of whom were Muslims. The scene was so deeply imprinted in his mind, that when he visited Vienna again for his meetings, he came again to visit me. He also made a video of our talk or interview together, which was later on put on Youtube.

The last contact he had with me was through an email jointly written by him and Rev. Valson Thampu, requesting me to write a chapter for the forthcoming book they were planning on his 80th birthday. Being a good friend and having journeyed together to various destinations, I was more than happy to put down as memory of our work together. I sent the matter to them by the middle of August and Swamiji did gratefully acknowledge my contribution to the book. I am sure it will be out soon.

Hearing of his passing away came as a great shock to me as, being away in Vienna, I was not aware of his sickness. While we are all indeed sorry for the great loss, we can be proud that his passing away caused by the injury to his liver, while fighting for a cause of the Tribals of Jharkhand, that he died a martyr's death. We should resolve to carry out the great mission which he with such deep love and commitment, dedicated himself to. May he live long in our hearts !

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Saturday, September 19th, 2020 at 3-26 p.m.



The Visioneers International Network

Celebrates the outstanding contribution to improving the human condition of

Swami Agnivesh

with a

Lifetime Achievement Award

as a

Hero of Humanity

There are a very few truly extraordinary people who are born to devote their lives to the service of humanity. Across the world, they face the challenge and opportunities of their time to uplift everyone whose lives they touch. These are the Heroes and Heroines of Humanity whose contributions to advancing the human project on Earth we wish to acknowledge, celebrate, and preserve as inspiration and guidance for the best that we can be.

This award recognizes and honours the exemplary and heroic contribution to the ongoing and positive development of a peaceful, sustainable, enriched and just quality of life for humanity.

Such Heroes of Humanity are the best expression of human nobility, whose courage to persevere lights the way for others to follow.

This award is a testament to their magnificent achievement.

Geraldine Schwartz, Ph.D

Desmond Berghofer, Ph.D



Dr. Geraldine Schwartz and Dr. Desmond Berghofer

Co-Founders

Visioneers International Network

Web of Good Work and Virtual Expo

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स्वामी अग्निवेश जी का जीवन सफ़र

स्वामी अग्निवेश काजन्म २१ सितंबर १९३६ को आंध्र प्रदेश के श्रीकाकुलम के एक रूढ़िवादी हिंदू ब्राह्मण परिवार में हुआ था। उनका पारिवारिक नाम वेपा श्याम राव रखा गया उन्होंने चार साल की उम्र में अपने पिता को खो दिया था। उनका लालन-पालन उनके नाना द्वारा किया गया था, जो कि छत्तीसगढ़ में

के लिए पलायनवाद नहीं था। अपने संन्यास के दिन, उन्होंने आर्य सभा नाम के एक राजनीतिक पार्टी स्वामी इंद्रवेश जी के साथ स्थापना की, ताकि वे राजनीतिक व्यवस्था के लिए काम कर सकें। इस पार्टी की स्थापना आर्य समाज के सिद्धांतों पर की गई थी, जैसा कि उन्होंने अपनी १९७४ की पुस्तक वैदिक

समाजवाद में लिखा है,

“सामाजिकता” के पक्ष में पूंजीवाद और साम्यवाद दोनों के भौतिकवाद को खारिज करता है। वर्षों से, स्वामी दयानंद सरस्वती, गांधीजी और कार्ल मार्क्स के रूप में विविध रूप में विचारकों के विचारों और लेखन से स्वामीजी प्रभावित हुए हैं। अंधविश्वास के विपरीत आध्यात्मिकता से प्रेरित सांसाजिक और आर्थिक न्याय और विश्वास ‘उनके दर्शन की नींव बन गए हैं।



स्वामीजी का राजनीतिक जीवन हरियाणा के संघर्ष के साथ शुरू हुआ क्योंकि यह पंजाब से अलग एक राज्य के रूप में उभर रहा था। एक उग्र वक्ता, वह शुरू से ही प्रभावी और प्रेरणादायक था, और सामने से उसकी अग्रणी शैली ने जल्द ही उसे पुलिस की क्रूरता का स्वाद दिलाया और उसे कई छोटे मजदूरों के लिए सलाखों के पीछे पहुंचा दिया। स्वामी इंद्रवेश के साथ, उन्होंने हरियाणा में कुल प्रतिबंध के लिए संघर्ष किया और किसानों की उपज के लिए पारिश्रमिक कीमतों के लिए संघर्ष किया। कुछ ही वर्षों में, उन्होंने खुद को “संपूर्ण क्रांति” का हिस्सा पाया-जयप्रकाश नारायण के इंदिरा राज व्यवस्था के खिलाफ स्पष्ट आह्वान किया।

अब शक्ति नामक एक रियासत के दीवान के पोते थे। उन्होंने विधि और वाणिज्य में डिग्री प्राप्त की, कोलकाता के प्रतिष्ठित सेंट जोसेयर कलेज में प्रबंधन में एक व्याख्याता बने और कुछ समय के लिए सब्ससावी मुखर्जी के जूनियर के रूप में कानून का अभ्यास किया, जो बाद में भारत के मुख्य न्यायाधीश बने। अपने छात्र दिनों में, वह आर्य समाज के प्रगतिशील आदर्शों के संपर्क में आए और इसके साथ जीवन भर का रिश्ता शुरू किया। एक अकादमिक और वकील के जीवन का नेतृत्व करने के लिए बेचैन, और अपने आसपास के विश्वास के नाम पर सामाजिक और आर्थिक अन्याय और अंधविश्वास की निरंतरता पर अधीर, वह आखिरकार कम उम्र में राजनीतिक और सामाजिक सक्रियता में डूब गए। १९६८ में, वह आर्य समाज में पूर्णकालिक कार्यकर्ता बन गए और दो साल बाद, संन्यास ग्रहण किया, सांसारिक संपत्ति और रिश्तों को त्याग दिया और इस प्रक्रिया में, स्वामी अग्निवेश। लेकिन त्याग का मतलब स्वामीजी

जब प्रधानमंत्री इंदिरा गांधी ने १९७५ में आपातकाल की घोषणा की तो स्वामीजी को भूमिगत होना पड़ा। बाद में, वह अपने कुछ सहयोगियों के साथ गिरफ्तार किया गया था और १४ महीने के लिए जेल भी जाना पड़ा था। १९७७ के चुनावों के बाद, जिराने इंदिरा गांधी को पद से हटा दिया, अग्निवेश हरियाणा राज्य विधान सभा के लिए चुने गए, और भजनलाल के मंत्रिमंडल में शिक्षा मंत्री बने। हालांकि, मोहभंग होने में उन्हें चार महीने से भी कम समय लगा। फरीदाबाद औद्योगिक बस्ती में पुलिस फायरिंग हुई जिसमें लगभग १० मजदूर मारे गए। स्वामीजी ने पहले मंत्रिमंडल में विरोध किया और बाद में सार्वजनिक रूप से अपनी ही सरकार के खिलाफ न्यायिक जांच की मांग की।



14 सितम्बर, 2020

प्रिय श्री विट्ठल राव आर्य,

प्रसिद्ध आर्य समाज नेता, राजनीतिज्ञ एवं सामाजिक चिंतक स्वामी अग्निवेश जी के निधन का समाचार सुनकर दुःख हुआ। स्वामी अग्निवेश का जन्म आन्ध्र प्रदेश के श्रीकाकुलम जिले में हुआ। विधि में पढ़ाई करने के उपरांत अधिवक्ता बनें तथा कुछ समय के लिए उन्होंने लेक्चरर के पद पर भी कार्य किया। स्वामी अग्निवेश सामाजिक मुद्दों पर खुलकर अपनी बातें रखते थे। उन्होंने कन्या भ्रूण हत्या, बाल एवं बंधुआ मजदूरी, नशे की प्रवृत्ति जैसे समाज सुधारक आन्दोलन चलाये। उन्होंने स्वयं का संपूर्ण जीवन प्रताड़ित वर्ग के सशक्तिकरण में व्यतीत कर दिया। उनकी सामाजिक समरसता, सेवा मिसाल अन्य के लिए प्रेरणा स्रोत है।

आर्य समाज से जुड़े होने के साथ-साथ उन्होंने हरियाणा की विधानसभा में विधायक का चुनाव लड़ा व शिक्षा मंत्री के रूप में भी समाज में फैली विसंगतियों के खिलाफ आवाज बुलन्द की।

वर्ष 1992 में जब मैं संसद सदस्य था तो मेरी पहली मुलाकात स्वामी अग्निवेश जी से हैदराबाद में आर्य समाज के कार्यक्रम में हुई। मैं उनके ओजरखी एवं प्रभावशाली भाषण से बहुत प्रभावित हुआ। समय-समय पर आर्य समाज के विभिन्न कार्यक्रमों में वे मुझे आदर सहित बुलाते थे। एक सन्यासी की वेशभूषा में वे सामाजिक सरोकार के विषयों पर हमेशा चिंतित रहते थे, जिसने मुझ पर गहरी छाप छोड़ी। वर्ष 1998 में जब मैं बाजपेयी जी की सरकार में मंत्री था तो वे पर्यावरण संरक्षण जैसे मुद्दों पर चर्चा करते थे। मेरे श्रम मंत्री रहते हुए उनसे बाल मजदूरी, बंधुआ जैसी कुशितियों पर परिचर्चा करने का अवसर प्राप्त हुआ। इस सम्बन्ध में बंधुआ मजदूरी पर जब मैंने नीति बनाई तो उन्होंने इसकी



उन्हें इस्तीफा देने के लिए कहा गया था। उन्होंने इस्तीफा दे दिया और अपनी सारी ऊर्जा और समय सामाजिक न्याय आंदोलनों में लगाने का फैसला किया।



यह स्वामीजी के प्रत्यक्ष राजनीतिक करियर का एक संक्षिप्त इतिहास है जहाँ तक निर्वाचित कार्यालय का संबंध है, हालाँकि तब से उनकी सक्रियता न तो राजनीतिक कार्रवाई से दूर रही है, और न ही उनके पद उदासीन है। इसने उन्हें देश के प्रमुख राजनेताओं के बीच पार्टी लाइनों में सराहा।

अपनी राजनीतिक यात्रा के समानांतर, हरियाणा में मंत्रियों के पद छोड़ने के बाद स्वामीजी की अथक सामाजिक सक्रियता उनका मुख्य कार्यक्षेत्र बन गई। हरियाणा के माध्यम से उनके शुरुआती मार्च ने उन्हें उस कहार से परिचित कराया, जो शराब ग्रामीण समाज और उसकी अर्थव्यवस्था को प्रभावित करती थी, और उन्होंने शराब की दुकानों को जल्द खत्म करने के लिए लड़ाई शुरू कर दी। गांधीजी के अंत्योदय के सिद्धांत के प्रति सत्य-सबसे वीरता की सेवा-स्वामीजी ने १९८० के दशक की शुरुआत में बंधुआ मजदूरी का कारण लिखा, एक संघर्ष जिसे वे दुनिया भर में सबसे ज्यादा जानते हैं और उनका सम्मान करते हैं। निराश्रित और वस्तुतः गुलामी को बेव दिया गया, यह लोगों के एक समूह का था, जो भारत के सामाजिक-आर्थिक सड़ी के बहुत नीचे थाय वे सार्वजनिक रिकार्ड में भी मौजूद नहीं थे। भारत में दासता हमेशा से अवैध रही है और बंधुआ मजदूरों के उन्मूलन को बंधुआ श्रम प्रणाली (उन्मूलन) अधिनियम, १९७६ के उद्घाषणा के कारण आपातकाल की सफलता के रूप में हेराल्ड किया गया था। लेकिन “कानूनों की पुस्तकों” और “कानून की कार्रवाई” के बीच की दूरी दुर्भाग्य से भारत में विशाल है। न्याय और धूल भरे पत्थर की खदानों में संघर्ष- एक लंबा और कठिन काम था। अरुण शौरी ने अपनी पुस्तक कोर्ट्स एंड जजमेंट्स में इस बात का जिक्र किया है। शुरुआत काफ़ी अशुभ थी।

जब उन्होंने हरियाणा के मुख्यमंत्री भजन लाल के

साथ इस मुद्दे को उठाया, तो उन्हें गंभीर परिणाम भुगतने की धमकी दी गई, और जल्द ही, दो साल पहले एक उद्योगपति की हत्या के आरोप में उनके खिलाफ एक नक्सली के रूप में मामला दर्ज किया गया।

स्वामीजी ने १९८१ में बंधुआ मुक्ति मोर्चा (बीएमएम या बहन्डेड लेबर लिबरेशन फ्रंट) की स्थापना की, एक संगठन जो अभी भी इसके अध्यक्ष के रूप में प्रमुख है। इस अभियान में बंधुआ मजदूरों की स्थिति के बारे में समझाने वाली अदालतें और उनके कहम-मिशनर शामिल थे। सर्वोच्च न्यायालय ने एक ऐतिहासिक निर्णय दिया, जिसमें किसी भी कर्मचारी को वैधानिक रूप से निर्धारित न्यूनतम मजदूरी से कम आय वाले व्यक्ति को बंधुआ मजदूर के रूप में पहचानना था। लेकिन वह शायद ही पर्याप्त था। सुप्रीम कोर्ट के निर्देशों को लागू करने में सरकार विफल रही। खदान-मालिकों ने पुलिस की आंखों के सामने हत्या के साथ मजदूरों पर आतंक फैलाया, और उन्हें औपचारिक पूछताछ से प्रभावी रूप से बंद कर दिया। स्वामीजी स्वयं १९८५ में रोहताक में कैद हो गए थे। कई वर्षों तक विवादित अदालती आदेशों, बार-बार पूछताछ आयोगों और सरकारी निष्क्रियता में बीत गए। अब भी, संघर्ष जारी है। इन वर्षों में, उड्ड ने १,८० ००० से अधिक भारतीय श्रमिकों की रिहाई हासिल की है, और अखिल भारतीय ईट भट्टा मजदूरों, पत्थर खदान श्रमिकों और निर्माण श्रमिकों सहित कई ट्रेड यूनियनों को बनाने में मदद की है। अंतरराष्ट्रीय स्तर पर भी काम करते हुए, स्वामी अग्निवेश को तीन बार संयुक्त राष्ट्र न्यास निधि के अध्यक्ष के रूप में गुलामी के समकालीन रूपों में चुना



गया है। जैसा कि जस्टिस पी.एन. भगवती भारत की पूर्व मुख्य न्यायाधीश और विख्यात मानवाधिकार अधिवक्ता भगवती बताती हैं, “यह पूरी तरह से (स्वामी अग्निवेश की) पहल थी जो वास्तव में (भारत में बंधुआ मजदूरों की दुर्दशा) को प्रकाश में लाया।” स्वामीजी के अथक संघर्ष के दशकों ने अब भीडिया, सार्वजनिक और राजनीतिक ध्यान को इस व्यावहारिक रूप से “अदृश्य” भारत में ला दिया है,



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प्रशंसा की तथा मुझे आकर स्वयं बधाई दी। मेरा मानना है कि इन गहन विवेचनाओं के फलस्वरूप ही समाज में फैली बुराइयों पर एक सशक्त कानून बनाकर अंकुश लगाया जा सका।

वे जब भी हैदराबाद प्रवास पर आते थे तो सामाजिक सरोकर के मुद्दों पर अक्सर मुझसे चर्चा करते थे। हमारी कई महत्वपूर्ण विषयों पर असहमति होते हुए भी व्यक्तिगत सम्बन्धों में कभी अन्तर नहीं आया।

बंजुआ जैसी दास प्रथा, नशे की प्रवृत्ति, छूआ-छूत और हर तरह के भेद-भाव के खिलाफ सक्रिय रहने वाली सशक्त आवाज को हमने हमेशा के लिए खो दिया है। आर्य समाज के अन्तर्राष्ट्रीय ख्याति प्राप्त सन्यासी, कान्तिकारी आर्य नेता व सामाजिक कार्यकर्ता स्वामी अग्निवेश के निधन से आर्य समाज के लिए अपरूणीय क्षति हुई है। स्वामी अग्निवेश जैसे आर्य विद्वान निडर, स्पष्टवादी, राष्ट्रभक्त की जगह कोई नहीं ले सकता। उनका हमारे बीच न रहना आर्य समाज सहित पूरे राष्ट्र के लिए बड़ी क्षति है। यह खबर मेरे लिए भी बेहद ही व्यक्तिगत शोक से संप्लित है।

मैं ईश्वर से प्रार्थना करता हूँ कि वे दिवंगत आत्मा को सद्गति प्रदान करें तथा परिवारजनों को इस दुःख को सहन करने की शक्ति प्रदान करें।

शुभेच्छु,

(बंडारू दत्तात्रेय)

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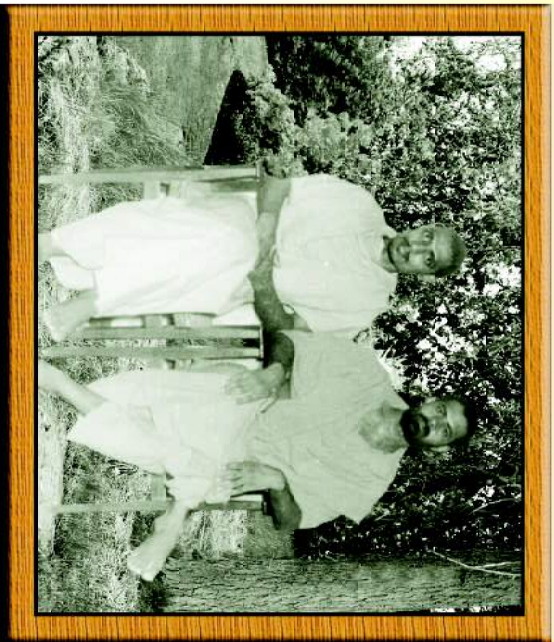


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जो वास्तव में आसान शिकार है, केवल उनके शोषकों के लिए। फिर भी, स्वामी अग्निवेश भारत में बाल श्रमिकों की संख्या (संवैधानिक प्रावधानों के बातजूद) आज भी ६५ मिलियन है। कुछ ऋण बंधन में है या माता-पिता द्वारा वित्तीय अग्रिमों के बदले में गिरवी रखे गए हैं। कुछ खरीददारों द्वारा लालच दिया जाता है जो प्रशिक्षण के बाद उज्ज्वल संभावनाओं का वादा करते हैं। इस मात्रा में योगदानकर्ताओं में से एक देवदत्त बंदोपाध्याय, बंधुआ मजदूरों की आबादी का त्वरित अनुमान लगाते हैं, जो आज भी ६० मिलियन है।

बंधुआ मजदूरी से मुक्ति और पुनर्वास, जबकि शायद स्वामीजी के अभियानों में सबसे निरंतर और प्रमुख है, केवल किस्ती भी अभियान से नहीं। इन वर्षों में, उन्होंने अनगिनत संघर्षों में भाग लिया है, आवाज देने वाले को आवाज दी है, शोषितों और अन्याय के पीड़ितों की वकालत की है चाहे राज्य के हथियों में हो या समाज के वर्गों के पूर्वाग्रहों और असहिष्णुता के कारण।

पारंपरिक भारत के कई हिस्सों में महिलाओं का उत्पीड़न कलंक बना हुआ है। १९८७ में, स्वामीजी ने एक युवा विधवा की सती की सबसे गीभल घटना (अपने पति के अंतिम संस्कार के लिए विधवाओं के विसर्जन पर रोक) का विरोध करने के लिए दिल्ली से देओराला, राजस्थान तक १८ दिन की लंबी पदयात्रा (पैदल मार्च) का नेतृत्व किया। मार्च रोक दिया गया



था, और स्वामीजी को संक्षेप में सलाखों के पीछे डाल दिया गया था, लेकिन दोनों को व्यापक, सहानुभूति प्राप्त हुई। उस वर्ष बाद में भारतीय संसद ने सती निवारण अधिनियम लागू किया। दिल्ली में वापस, आकर उन्होंने कन्या भ्रूण हत्या के खिलाफ एक

अभियान चलाया, जिसके परिणामस्वरूप कानून भी बना। हाल ही में, उन्होंने गुजरात, राजस्थान, पंजाब, हरियाणा, और दिल्ली के माध्यम से महिला भ्रूणों के गर्भापात के खिलाफ अभियान चलाया, जिसमें भारत में सबसे अधिक तिरछी सेक्स अनुपात थे।

भारत में निचली जातियों की दुर्दशा निरंतर और गहन सामाजिक कार्रवाई की जरूरत है। १९८८-८९ में, राजस्थान के उदयपुर के पास, नाथद्वारा मंदिर में “अभूत” के पारंपरिक रूप से वर्जित प्रवेश को सुरक्षित करने के लिए स्वामी जी ने व्यापक रूप से कवर आंदोलन का नेतृत्व किया। फिर से, उसे गिरफ्तार कर लिया गया, लेकिन कार्रवाई का जनमत पर पर्याप्त प्रभाव पड़ा।

अपने पूरे जीवन में, स्वामीजी ने धर्म के नाम पर सांप्रदायिकता और असहिष्णुता के खिलाफ लड़ाई लड़ी। १९८९ में, उन्होंने ४५ मुस्लिम युवकों के जीवन का दावा करने वाली सांप्रदायिक हिंसा के खिलाफ विरोध करने और उन्हें अपमानित करने के लिए दिल्ली से मेरठ तक एक बहु-धार्मिक मार्च का नेतृत्व किया। १९९९ में, धार्मिक कट्टरवाद और अश्लीलता को बढ़ाने के बारे में चिंतित, उन्होंने सामाजिक न्याय के लिए धर्म नामक एक बहु-धार्मिक मंच शुरू करने में मदद की, जिससे ५५ धार्मिक नेताओं का एक समूह उस स्थान पर चला गया जहां अहमदियाई ईसाई मिशनरी ग्राहम स्टूडन और उनके दो बेटों को जला दिया गया था। उनकी नींद में मौत की वजह से हिंदू बड़े लोगों को नुकसान पहुंचा है। २००२ के गुजरात दंगों के मद्देनजर, स्वामीजी ने ७२ प्रसिद्ध धार्मिक-सामाजिक नेताओं के एक समूह का आयोजन किया, जिन्होंने गुजरात के हिंसा प्रभावित इलाकों में पांच दिन बिताए और नरसंहार के लिए जिम्मेदार हिंदू कट्टरपंथी संगठनों और क्षेत्रों की निंदा की। स्वामीजी ने राजस्थान और मध्य प्रदेश जैसे राज्यों में इस तरह के नरसंहार की पुनरावृत्ति को रोकने के लिए अध्यात्म जागरण मंच (आध्यात्मिक जागृति के लिए आंदोलन) शुरू किया।

वह “हिंदुत्व” विचारधारा की निंदा में असमान थे, जो उनके अनुसार, सभी संबंधितों के लिए विनाशकारी संभावनाओं के साथ हिंदू धर्म का अपहरण करना चाहता है।

इन वर्षों में, रवागीजी ने अनगिनत लोगों के आंदोलनों में भाग लिया, अर्थात्, असम में अहल असम स्टूडेंट्स यूनियन (AASU) आंदोलन, बिहार में छत्र युवा संघर्ष ग्राहिनी आंदोलन, शेतकारी संगठन और किसानों के लिए भारतीय किसान यूनियन का संघर्ष, असंगठित मजदूर संघर्ष। तमिलनाडु, नर्मदा बचाओ आंदोलन



Condolence Message from Dr Mannohan Singh

September 12, 2020

I am shocked and saddened to learn about the demise of the leading social activist and reformer Swami Agnivesh. He made immense contribution in public life while working for bonded labourers and fostering inter-religious harmony in the country.

In his death our country has lost a crusader of the liberation of bonded labourers.

My heartfelt condolences to his followers.

Dr Mannohan Singh
Former Prime Minister



Sonia Gandhi
Chairperson

Congress Parliamentary Party

Condolence Message

I am grieved to learn of the passing away of Swami Agnivesh. All his life he fought with great courage and conviction for the most marginalized sections of our society, fearless in defending their rights and in facing up to those who exploited and oppressed them and terrorised the poor, often at great personal risk. He was a most powerful and effective voice for the vulnerable and the defenceless. Swami Agnivesh's energy and faith in constructive social activism was indeed admirable and inspiring. He worked with equal dynamism to promote interfaith understanding and dialogue, non violence, and justice for the tribal people of Chhattisgarh, caught in a violent conflict. He will be widely mourned, and India will honour the memory of this brave and noble soul.

May his soul rest in peace.

और आंध्र प्रदेश और हरियाणा दोनों में शराब के खिलाफ महिलाओं के आंदोलन के साथ अभियान चलाया, दोनों राज्यों में पूर्ण शराबबंदी (हालांकि एक छोटी अवधि के लिए)।

हाल ही में, उन्होंने टेलिविजन पर “मंथन” नामक एक बहुप्रशंसित बहु-भाग श्रृंखला की शुरुआत की, जिसमें विभिन्न धर्मों के धार्मिक शिक्षकों को एक साथ लाया गया और महिलाओं के अधिकारों और आतंकवाद



जैसे प्रमुख सामाजिक मुद्दों पर बहस की गई। इसने अन्य धर्मों (और अक्सर अपने) के बारे में लोगों की कई गहरी गलत धारणाओं को दूर करने में मदद की और सभी धर्मों के सार्वभौमिक मानवतावादी पहलू के साथ-साथ समाज के लिए उनकी प्रासंगिकता पर प्रकाश डाला। वह वर्तमान में एक प्रमुख पहल, सर्व धर्म

संसद

(धर्मों की संसद) में शामिल है, जो भारत में सामाजिक क्रिया के एक सामान्य न्यूनतम कार्यक्रम के आधार पर क्रहस-आस्था संवाद, सद्भाव और समझ के माहौल के लिए मंच निर्धारित करना चाहता है। बार-बार, उन्होंने आतंकवाद के साथ इस्लाम के जुड़ाव के खिलाफ अपनी आवाज उठाई है। कभी आराम नहीं करने पर, स्वामी ने २००८ में शांति और वार्ता को शांत करने के लिए कश्मीर के संकट के चरम पर यात्रा की और डेरा सच्चा सौदा और अकाल तख्त के सिख समूहों के बीच मध्यस्थता की।

आर्थिक मामलों में, स्वामीजी ने गंगा उपभोक्तावाद के खिलाफ अभियान चलाया, जिसने आज भारत को नलोबलाइन कर दिया है और वैश्वीकरण का आधार रूप है जो स्थानीय लोगों को बहुराष्ट्रीय कंपनियों के लिए लाभ लेने के लिए उकसाता है। बार-बार, उन्होंने हमें याद दिलाया है कि भारत ने हमेशा वैश्वीकरण की वफादारी की है-वास्तव में वसुधैव कुटुम्बकम् (पूरी दुनिया एक परिवार है) जो भारत का एक कालातीत

उदाहरण है। और फिर भी, आज का वैश्वीकरण, अगर यह सीमा-कम समझ और करुणा के बजाय लालच का वैश्वीकरण बना हुआ है, तो विनाशकारी परिणाम होने के लिए बाध्य है। लंदन, १९९० में



एंटी-स्लेवरी इंटरनेशनल अवार्ड, बर्न, १९९४ में स्वतंत्रता और मानवाधिकार पुरस्कार और सांप्रदायिक सद्भाव के लिए राजीव गांधी पुरस्कार सहित कई राष्ट्रीय और अंतर्राष्ट्रीय पुरस्कारों के रूप में मान्यता उनके पास आई है। रवीडन, २००४ से राइट लाइवलीड्ड अवार्ड (“वैकल्पिक नोबेल पुरस्कार”)। हालांकि, अभियान और गंश की एक सूची, हालांकि प्रभावशाली (और पुरस्कार सूची लेकिन बड़े पैमाने पर कर्मकांड स्वामीजी का एक मामूली हिस्सा शामिल है) शायद ही एक झलक प्रदान कर सकते हैं। उस व्यक्ति के लिए जो इन महत्वपूर्ण कार्यों को एनिमेट करता हैय वह लिस्टिंग में शामिल तारीखों और वर्षों के बीच समान रूप से सक्रिय और सुसंगत है।



Dr. Baburam Bhattarai
Former Prime Minister of Nepal
Member of Parliament
Gorkha-2



डा. बाबुराम भट्टराई
पूर्वप्रधानमन्त्री
प्रतिनिधिसभा सदस्य
गोरखा-२

Condolence Message

My wife Hisila and I are deeply saddened by the sudden passing away of Swami Agnivesh. We will always treasure the fond memory of Swamiji graciously solemnizing our marriage in 1981 in Delhi.


We have had opportunities to join many street marches with Swamiji in favor of the freedom and rights of bonded labourers, migrant workers and the oppressed masses of the people during our student days in Delhi.

He was a great friend of Nepal and the Nepalese people. He visited Nepal a number of times. He resolutely supported the democratic struggles of the Nepalese people over the years. In recognition of this contribution there was a spontaneous public pouring of grief in Nepal at the news of his sad demise.

He was an outstanding personality of our time — a combination of a saint, scholar, politician, social activist, humanist and an apostle of peace. His life and works will guide us for a long time to come.

We pay our sincere tribute to him and extend our heartfelt condolences to his near and dear ones. May his soul rest in peace.

20 September, 2020


Baburam Bhattarai

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Dr. Baburam Bhattarai
Former Prime Minister of , Nepal

LIFE JOURNEY OF SWAMI AGNIVESH

Swami Agnivesh was born Vepa Shyam Rao on September 21, 1939 in an orthodox Hindu Brahmin family of Srikakulam in Andhra Pradesh. He lost his father at the age of four. He was brought up by his maternal grandfather who in turn was the grandson of the Diwan of a princely state called Shakti, now in Chhattisgarh. He gained degrees in Law and Commerce, became a lecturer in management at the reputed St Xavier's College in Kolkata and for a while practiced law as a junior to Sabyasachi Mukherji for a while who later became the Chief Justice of India. In his student days, he had come in contact with the progressive ideals of the Arya Samaj and began a life-long relationship with it. Restless in leading the life of an academic and lawyer, a n d impatient at t h e continuance of social and economic injustice and superstition in the name of faith around him, he finally plunged into political and social activism at a young age, leaving Kolkata for Haryana, that became the platform for his action for decades to come. It was the magnetic pull of Swami Indraves, a great scholar—activist of Haryana, which brought about a radical transformation within him.



In 1968, he became a full-time worker at the Arya Samaj, and two years later, embraced sanyas, renouncing worldly possessions and relationships and becoming, in the process, Swami Agnivesh. But renunciation never meant escapism for Swamiji. On the day of his sanyas, he co-founded a political party with Swami Indraves, the Arya Sabha, to work for political order. This party was founded on Arya Samaj principles which, as he spells out in his 1974 book Vaidik Samajyad (Vedic Socialism), rejects the lopsided materialism of both capitalism and communism in favor of "social spirituality". Over the years, Swamiji has been influenced by the thoughts and writings of thinkers as diverse as Swami Dayanand Saraswati, Gandhiji and Karl Marx. Social and economic justice and faith inspired

by spirituality as opposed to superstition have remained the foundations of his philosophy.

Swamiji's political life started with the struggle for Haryana's fair share as it was emerging as a state separated from Punjab. A fiery orator, he was effective and inspirational right from the beginning, and his style of leading from the front soon brought him the taste of police brutality and landed him behind bars for several short spells. Together with Swami Indraves, he spear headed struggles for Total Prohibition in Haryana and for remunerative prices for farmers' produce. Within a few short years, he found himself a

part of "Total Revolution"—Jaiprakash Narayan's clarion call against the Indira Gandhi regime. Swamiji had to go underground when Prime Minister Indira Gandhi declared Emergency in 1975 cracking down on opposition parties. Later, he was arrested with

some of his colleagues and was jailed for 14 months. After the 1977 elections, which swept Indira Gandhi off from office, Agnivesh was elected to the Haryana State Legislative Assembly, and became the Education Minister in Bhajan Lal's Cabinet. However, it took him less than four months to become disillusioned. There was police firing in the Faridabad industrial township killing around 10 workers. Swamiji protested first in the Cabinet and later publicly demanded a judicial enquiry against his own government. He was asked to resign. He resigned and decided to devote all his energy and time to social justice movements. This is a brief history of Swamiji's direct political career so far as elected office is concerned, though neither his activism since then has been far from political action, nor are his positions apolitical. This has won him admirers across party lines among major politicians of the country.

Parallel to his political journey, Swamiji's tireless social activism became his main area of work after he stepped down from ministership in Haryana. His very early marches through Haryana acquainted him with the

CM KCR condoles death of Swamy Agnivesh

By TelanganaToday | Published: 11th September 2020



Hyderabad: Chief Minister K. Chandrashekhara Rao has expressed shock over the death of prominent social activist Swamy Agnivesh.

Recalling that Swami Agnivesh had extended support to the Telangana Statehood movement from the beginning, the Chief Minister pointed out that he had participated in meetings, conferences and programs of separate Statehood movement. Chandrashekhara Rao conveyed his condolences to members of the bereaved family.

← Telangana CMO 6,251 Tweets

Tweets

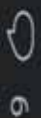
Tweets & replies

Media

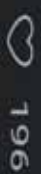
Likes



Telangana CMO @TelanganaCMO · 1h
CM Sri K. Chandrashekar Rao has expressed his shock over the death of prominent social activist Sri Swami Agnivesh. The CM recalled that Swami Agnivesh had given his support to the Telangana Statehood movement from the beginning.



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Telangana CMO @TelanganaCMO · 1h
The CM recalled that Swami Agnivesh had participated in the meetings, conferences and programs of the separate Telangana statehood movement. The CM has conveyed his condolences to members of Swami Agnivesh family.



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67



Telangana CMO @TelanganaCMO · 2h
ప్రముఖ సామాజిక కార్యకర్త శ్రీ స్వామి అగ్నివేష్ మరణం పట్ల ముఖ్యమంత్రి శ్రీ కె. చంద్రశేఖర్ రావు తీవ్ర దిగ్భ్రాంతిని వ్యక్తం చేశారు. తెలంగాణ ఉద్యమానికి స్వామి అగ్నివేష్ మొదటి నుంచి సంపూర్ణ మద్దతుగా నిలిచారని ముఖ్యమంత్రి గుర్తు చేశారు.



5 21



197



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ఉద్యమ సందర్భంలో జరిగిన సమావేశాలు, కార్యక్రమాల్లో స్వయంగా పాల్గొన్నారుని గుర్తు



havoc that liquor caused to the rural society and its economy, and he began fighting for abolishing liquor outlets early on. True to Gandhiji's principle of *Antyodaya*—the service of the most deprived—Swamiji took up the cause of bonded labor in the early 1980s, a struggle he is best known and respected for the world over. Destitute and virtually sold to slavery, this was a group of people arguably at the very bottom of India's socio-economic ladder; they did not even exist in public records. Slavery has always been illegal in India and abolition of bonded labor was heralded as a success of Emergency because of the promulgation of the

directives. Quarry-owners unleashed terror on the laborers with murder before the eyes of the police, and effectively shut them from formal inquiries. Swamiji himself was imprisoned at Rohtak in 1985. Years passed in conflicting court orders, repeated inquiry commissions and government in action. Even now, the struggle continues. Over the years, BMW has secured the release of more than 1,72,000 Indian workers, and has helped create a number of trade unions, including the All India Brick Kiln Workers, the Stone Quarry Workers, and the Construction Workers. Working also at the international level, Swami Agnivesh



Bonded Labor System (Abolition) Act, 1976. But the distance between "laws in books" and "law in action" has unfortunately been vast in India. The struggle—in courts of justice and dusty stone-quarries—was a long and uphill task. Arun Shourie chronicles this at length in his book *Courts and their Judgments*. The beginning was ominous enough. When he raised the issue with Haryana's Chief Minister Bhajan Lal, he was threatened with dire consequences, and soon, a case was registered against him as a Naxalite, on the charge of murdering an industrialist two years ago!¹

Swamiji founded the Bandhua Mukti Morcha (BMW or the Bonded Labour Liberation Front) in 1981, an organization he still heads as its chairperson. The campaign involved convincing courts and their commissioners of the status of bonded labor. The Supreme Court gave a landmark-ruling identifying any employee earning less than the statutorily fixed minimum wages as bonded labor. But that was hardly enough. The government failed to implement Supreme Court

has thrice been elected as Chairperson of the UN Trust Fund on Contemporary Forms of Slavery. As Justice P.N. Bhagwati, a former Chief Justice of India and noted Human Rights advocate, points out, "it was entirely (Swami Agnivesh's) initiative which truly brought (the plight of the bonded labor in India) into light."

Decades of tireless struggle by Swamiji has now brought media, public, and political attention to this practically "invisible" underclass in India, visible, indeed easy prey, only to their exploiters. Yet, Swami Agnivesh puts the number of child laborers in India (despite constitutional provisions) at 65 million even today. Some are in debt bondage or have been pledged by parents in return for financial advances; some are lured by procurers who promise bright prospects after training. Debabrata Bandopadhyay, one of the contributors in this volume, puts a quick estimate of the population of bonded labor even today at a staggering 90 million.



Tweet



Rahul Gandhi
@RahulGandhi

बंधुआ मुक्ति मोर्चा के संस्थापक और आर्य समाज के क्रान्तिकारी नेता स्वामी अग्निवेश जी का आज निधन हो गया।

स्वामी जी का निधन आर्य समाज सहित पूरे देश के लिए अपूरणीय क्षति है।

मेरी विनम्र श्रद्धांजलि।

[Translate Tweet](#)



Rahul Gandhi
Member of Parliament

Emancipation and rehabilitation of bonded labor, while perhaps the most sustained and prominent of Swamiji's campaigns, is by no means his only campaign. Over the years, he has participated in countless struggles, giving voice to the voiceless, advocating for the oppressed and the victims of injustice whether at the hands of the state or of prejudices and intolerance of sections of society. As Dr Manmohan Singh has aptly said, "There is no endeavor to enlarge social justice within the country and in the wider world in which Swami Agnivesh is not in the forefront..."

Oppression of women remains a stigma in many parts of traditional India. In 1987, Swamiji led an 18-day long padyatra (march on foot) from Delhi to Deorala in Rajasthan to protest against the most gruesome incident of sati (the immolation of widows on their husband's funeral pyres) of a young widow. The march was stopped, and Swamiji was briefly put behind bars, but both received widespread, sympathetic coverage. The Indian Parliament later in that year enacted the Sati Prevention Act. Back in Delhi, he launched a campaign against female foeticide, which also resulted in legislation. Recently, he campaigned against the abortion of female fetuses through Gujarat, Rajasthan, Punjab, Haryana, and Delhi—the states with most skewed sex ratios in India.

The plight of the lower castes in India remains an area in need of sustained and intense social action. In 1988-89, Swamiji led a widely-covered movement to secure the traditionally barred entry of "untouchables" into Nathdwara temple, near Udaipur, Rajasthan. Again, he was arrested, but the action had a substantial impact on public opinion.

All his life, Swamiji has fought against communalism and intolerance in the name of religion. In 1989, he led a multi-religious march from Delhi to Meerut to protest against and defuse communal violence that had claimed the lives of 45 Muslim youths. In 1999, concerned about escalating religious fundamentalism and obscurantism, he helped launch a multi-religious forum called Religions for Social Justice, which led a group of 55 religious leaders to the place where the Australian Christian missionary Graham Steines and his two sons were burned to death in their sleep by a group of rightwing Hindu bigots. In the wake of Gujarat riots of 2002, Swamiji organized a group of 72 eminent religious—social leaders who spent five days in the violence-affected areas of Gujarat and denounced the Hindu fundamentalist organizations and sectors responsible for the massacre. Swamiji launched the Adhyatma Jagaran Manch (Movement for Spiritual Awakening) to prevent the repetition of such genocide in states like Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh. He was unequivocal in the condemnation of the "Hindutva" ideology, which, according to him, seeks to hijack

Hinduism with disastrous prospects for all concerned.

Over the years, Swamiji has participated in countless people's move-ments, namely, All Assam Students' Union (AASU) movement in Assam, Chhatra Yuva Sangharsh Vahini movement in Bihar, Shetkari Sangathan's and Bhartiya Kisan Union's struggles for farmers, Unorganized Labor struggle in Tamil Nadu, the Narmada Bachao Andolan and campaigned with women's movements against alcohol in both Andhra Pradesh and Haryana, winning total prohibition (though for a short period) in both states.

More recently, he anchored a much-acclaimed multi-part series on television titled "Manthan" that brought together religious teachers from various faiths and debated on major social issues like women's rights and terrorism. It helped dispel several deep-rooted misconceptions of people about other faiths (and often their own) and highlighted the universal humanist aspect of all faiths as well as their relevance to society. He is currently involved in a major initiative, Sarva Dharma Sansad (Parliament of Religions) that seeks to set the stage for an atmosphere of cross-faith dialogue, harmony, and understanding in India based on a Common Minimum Program of Social Action. Time and again, he has raised his voice against the stereo typing of the association of Islam with terrorism. Never at rest, Swamiji has traveled to Kashmir at the peak of trouble in 2008 to counsel peace and dialogue and has been mediating between feuding Sikh groups of Dera Sachcha Sauda and Akal Takht.

In economic matters, Swamiji has campaigned against naked consumerism that has gripped India today and the base form of globalization that uproots local people to reap profits for multinationals. Time and again, he has reminded us that India has always espoused globalization—indeed vasudhaiva kutumbakam (the whole world is a family) which is a timeless precept of India. And yet, today's globalization, if it remains a globalization of greed rather than of boundary-less understanding and compassion, is bound to have disastrous consequences.

Recognition has come to him over the years in the form of several national and international awards including the Anti-Slavery International Award in London, 1990, the Freedom and Human Rights Award in Berne, 1994, and the Rajiv Gandhi Award for Communal Harmony and the Right Livelihood Award (the "alternative Nobel Prize") from Sweden, 2004. A listing of campaigns and kudos, however impressive, (and the awards list but a minuscule part of the massive karmakanda Swamiji has been involved with) can hardly provide a glimpse of the person that animates these momentous actions; he is equally active and consistent between the dates and years included in the listing.

Pinarayi Vijayan



Pinarayi Vijayan
@vijayanpinarayi

Chief Minister of Kerala

We are deeply saddened to learn of the passing away of social activist Swami Agnivesh. He was led by his conscience and all through his life remained a relentless voice for the oppressed and unheard. On behalf of the people of Kerala, I offer our deepest condolences.



Amarinder Singh

Chief Minister of Punjab



Tweet



Capt. Amarinder Singh
@capt_amarinder

Saddened to hear of Social Activist Swami Agnivesh Ji's demise. He will be remembered as a fine rational thinker who stood for liberal values and religious amity. My deepest condolences to his family and followers. May he rest in peace! 🙏

9:08 PM · Sep 11, 2020 · Twitter for iPhone

Tweet

Mamata Banerjee @Mamata Official

11th September

Grieved at the passing of Swami Agnivesh, who gave up a career as a professor in Kolkata to fight for many causes. My condolences to his friends and followers



Tweet



Ashok Gehlot
@ashokgehlot51

My sincere condolences at the demise of Arya Samaj leader and social activist [#SwamiAgnivesh ji](#). His work towards upholding human rights and against bonded labour shall always be remembered. May God give strength to his supporters to bear his loss. May his soul rest in peace.

Ashok Gehlot ji Chief Minister of Rajasthan



Bhupesh Baghel
@bhupeshbaghel

छत्तीसगढ़ की माटी से जुड़े और आध्यात्मिक चेतना के साथ साथ भारत में बंधुआ मजदूरों के हितों के लिए संघर्ष करने वाले स्वामी अग्निवेश जी के निधन का समाचार दुःखद है।

ईश्वर उनकी आत्मा को शांति प्रदान करें।



Bhupesh Baghel Chief Minister of Chhattisgarh



बिहार: स्वामी अग्निवेश के निधन पर सीएम नीतीश कुमार ने जताया शोक

समाजसेवी और आर्य समाज के नेता स्वामी अग्निवेश (Swami Agnivesh) का निधन हो गया है. मुख्यमंत्री नीतीश कुमार और उप मुख्यमंत्री सुशील कुमार मोदी ने स्वामी अग्निवेश के निधन पर शोक जताया है.

पटना: समाजसेवी और आर्य समाज के नेता स्वामी अग्निवेश (Swami Agnivesh) का निधन हो गया है. मुख्यमंत्री नीतीश कुमार और उप मुख्यमंत्री सुशील कुमार मोदी ने स्वामी अग्निवेश के निधन पर शोक जताया है. सीएम ने शोक संदेश में कहा कि वो आजीवन समाज सेवा में लगे रहे. ईश्वर उनकी आत्मा को शांति दे.

सीएम ने कहा कि निधन देश-समाज को अपूर्णीय क्षति हुई है. उनकी सामाजिक समरसता, सेवा मिसाल है और वो प्रेरणा से स्रोत थे. आपको बता दें कि ८० वर्षीय स्वामी अग्निवेश को मंगलवार को तबियत बिगड़ने पर दिल्ली के इंस्टीट्यूट अहक लिवर एंड बिलेरी साइंसेज (आईएलबीएस) में भर्ती कराया गया था. जहां वह वेंटिलेटर पर थे.

वह लिवर सिरोसिस से पीड़ित थे और इलाज के दौरान उन्हें मल्टी अहर्गन फेल्योर की समस्या से भी जूझना पड़ रहा था. अस्पताल की तरफ से जारी बयान के मुताबिक, स्वामी अग्निवेश को शुक्रवार शाम करीब छह बजे दिल का दौरा पड़ा. इहकटोरों की कोशिशों के बावजूद उन्हें नहीं बचाया जा सका. उन्होंने करीब छह बजकर ३० मिनट पर अंतिम सांस ली.



सामाजिक मुद्दों पर खुलकर बोलते थे अग्निवेश : CM नीतीश Nitya Kumar CM of Bihar

पटना, हिन्दुस्तान

Swami Agnivesh passed away : on Friday 11th September 2020

मुख्यमंत्री नीतीश कुमार ने जाने-माने आर्य समाजी नेता, राजनीतिक एवं सामाजिक चिंतक स्वामी अग्निवेश के निधन पर गहरी शोक संवेदना प्रकट की है।

मुख्यमंत्री ने कहा है कि स्वामी अग्निवेश सामाजिक मुद्दों पर खुलकर अपनी बातें रखते थे। वे हरियाणा सरकार में शिक्षा मंत्री भी रहे। उन्होंने कन्या भ्रूण हत्या एवं महिलाओं से जुड़े कई समाज सुधार आन्दोलन चलाये। उनके निधन से देश ने एक राजनीतिक एवं सामाजिक चिंतक खो दिया है। मुख्यमंत्री ने दिवंगत आत्मा की चिर शान्ति तथा उनके परिजनों एवं प्रशंसकों को दुख की इस घड़ी में धैर्य धारण करने की शक्ति प्रदान करने की ईश्वर से प्रार्थना की है।

Shashi Tharoor

MP

Lok Sabha



Shashi Tharoor
@ShashiTharoor

My tribute to Swami Agnivesh, "a striking presence in saffron robes and turban, his words as fiery as his burning eyes flaming indignation behind frameless glasses":



Swami Agnivesh, 'Monk' Who Married Hinduism to Socialist Beliefs
thequint.com

Sitaram Yechury General Secretary of CPI



Tweet



Sitaram Yechury
@SitaramYechury

Deepest heartfelt condolences at the passing away of Swami Agnivesh, relentless crusader for universal human rights, upliftment of the marginalised, oppressed and in defence of the Indian Constitution, social harmony, democratic rights & civil liberties.



ཨ་རིའི་ཡུལ་འཕུལ་པ་གསལ་ཁྲིལ་ TIBETAN PARLIAMENT-IN-EXILE

འཕགས་པ་འཇུག་པ་འཇུག་པ་

Date: 14th September, 2020

Swami Aryavesh, President
World Council of Arya Samaj
7- JantarMantar Road
New Delhi- 110001

Hon'ble Sir,

We are deeply saddened to learn the demise of the Indian Social activist, former Cabinet Minister of Haryana Government and Arya Samaj leader Swami Agnivesh.

On behalf of Tibetans in and outside of Tibet, I would like to offer our deepest condolence to his family and the followers during this difficult time.

Late Swami Agnivesh was known for his work against bonded labour through the Bonded Labour Liberation Front, which he founded in 1981. The organisation worked on issues surrounding bonded labour in India, especially in the quarries in and around Delhi.

He became president (2004–2014) of the World Council of Arya Samaj from 2004-2014 which is the highest international body of the Arya Samaj. He was also an advocate for dialogue between religions and remained involved in various areas of social activism, including campaigns against female foeticide and the emancipation of women. He was a true warrior for humanity.

Late Swami Agnivesh had great respect for His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama and he has been the long-time supporter of Tibet's cause. He also actively participated in the campaign for the Tibet cause in India Gate, JantarMantar in Delhi and Prathna Sabha at Rajghat from time to time.

He actively participated in the 2008 boycott China Olympic campaign and the Self-Immolation International campaign for Tibet in 2012, he expressed his solidarity with the Tibet's movement through a speech delivered at these occasions. Most importantly, Tibetan Parliamentary Delegations had the opportunity to meet and converse with him regarding the Tibet issue for which we are immensely grateful. We hope that his followers will continue to fulfill his visions and the support he has rendered towards our cause.

His demise is a huge loss for the whole nation, his followers and to us Tibetans. Once again, kindly accept our heartfelt condolence to you and his follower at this difficult time.

May his soul rest in peace.

Sincerely,

Pemajungney (Mr.)
Speaker
Tibetan Parliament-in-Exile

Gangchen Kyishong, Dharamsala-176215, Distt. Kangra (H.P.) India
Tel: (+91)01892-222481 Fax: (+91)01892-224593 Email: tibetanparliament@tibet.net

Tibetan Parliament In Exile

SURESH PRABHU
MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT
(RAJYA SABHA)



7B, Lathi Estate
New Delhi 110 003
Tel : 011-24604476, 24610478

19/09/2020

Dear Swami Aryavesh Ji,

I am in receipt of your letter dated 16th September, 2020. The sudden demise of Swami Agnivesh Ji on 11th September, 2020 has saddened me and many other people who have followed him for a long time.

I am sending my prayers and condolences to you. May Swami Ji's soul rest in peace in heaven.

S P. Prabu

(Suresh Prabhu)

Swami Aryavesh
Working President, Bandhua Mukti Morcha
President world Council of Arya Samaj
7, Jantar Mantar Road,
New Delhi -110001

B-21, Gudhna, 16th Cross Road, Khar West, Mumbai 400 052
Phone : 022-26490040, Email: sureshprabhu@gmail.com



Tweet

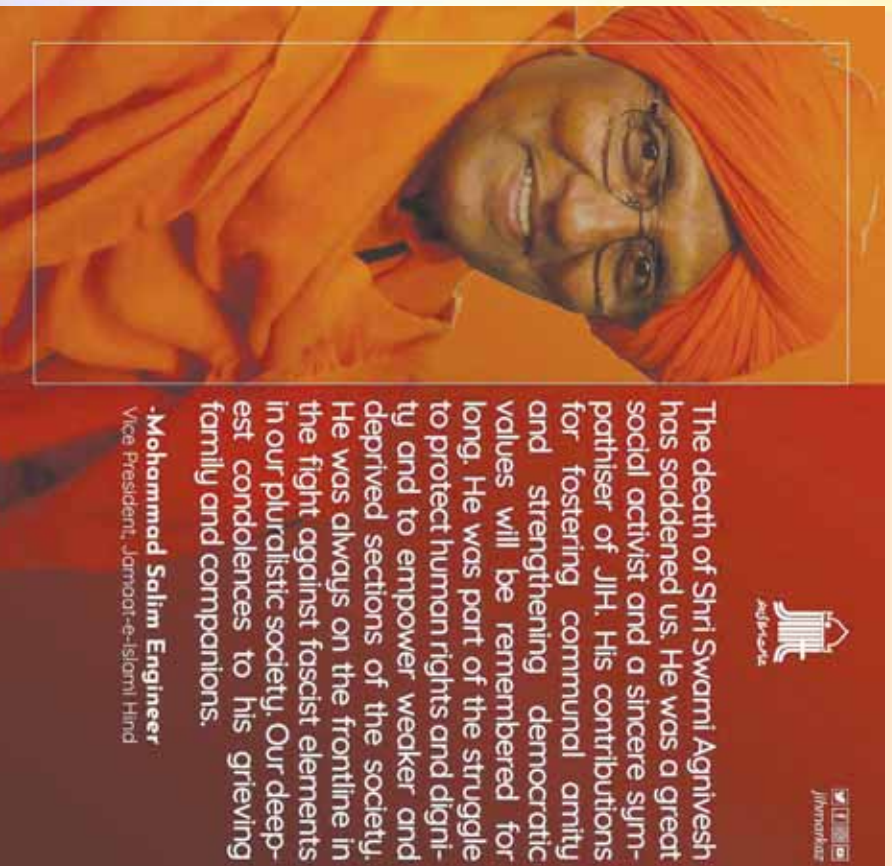


Prashant Bhushan ✓
@pbbhushan1

Prashant Bhushan
Senior Advocate
Supreme Court of India

The demise of Swami Agnivesh is a huge tragedy. A true warrior for humanity&tolerance. Among the bravest that I knew,willing to take huge risks for public good.Was brutalised in Jharkhand by a BJP/RSS lynch mob 2 yrs ago. Liver got damaged. RIP Agnivesh ji

Dipankar Bhattacharya General Secretary of CPI ML



-Mohammad Salim Engineer
Vice President, Jammot-e-Islami Hind

Mohammad Salim Engineer Vice President Jammot -e- Islami Hind

THE NEWS SCROLL

12 SEPTEMBER 2021 Last Updated at 11:23 AM | SOURCE: PTI

TN leaders condole demise of Swami Agnivesh



Chennai, Sep 12 (PTI) Top leaders of DMK and PMK, MK Stalin and S Ramadoss, on Saturday condoled the death of social activist Swami Agnivesh. The 80 year-old Agnivesh, suffering from liver cirrhosis for a long time, died of multi-organ failure at a Delhi hospital on Friday. Heaping praises on the deceased activist, DMK chief M K Stalin described him as social reformer who struggled against issues like bonded labour and female infanticide. "Despite being attacked by communal forces many times, he remained steadfast on his policies," Stalin said in a statement. He recalled Swami Agnivesh meeting him here in December 2018 and said his demise was a "big loss" to the country and condoled the latter's death. PMK founder S Ramadoss mourned the death of his "friend", Swami Agnivesh and said he was supportive of the party's stand against alcohol and smoking. He had joined the PMK's protests on these issues in Delhi and Tamil Nadu, Ramadoss said in a statement. His demise was a "great loss", he added. DK leader K Veeramani also condoled Swami Agnivesh's death. PTI SA ROH ROH

← Tweet



Raj Babbar ✓
@RajBabbarMP

Raj Babbar
Former Member of Parliament

Condolences on the demise of Swami Agnivesh. His lifelong efforts to champion the rights of bonded labourers will always remain unparalleled. As a religious reformer & a crusader for women rights, he had many admirers like me, who believed in his cause. RIP Swami ji.

← Tweet



Ramachandra Guha ✓
@Ram_Guha

Ramchandra Guha
Renowned Historian of India

Very sorry to hear of the passing of Swami Agnivesh. He was an incredibly courageous human being, a heroic (and always non-violent) fighter for the underprivileged. And he had a wonderful sense of fun. Every meeting with him was both educative and joyous.

← Tweet



Salman Nizami
@SalmanNizami_

#SwamiAgnivesh Ji's passing is a personal loss to me. We worked together. One of the finest humans beings, a truly honorable man is no more. Would be remembered for his tireless service to humanity. Om Shanti!



Dr. Vishwanath Karad
MIT WORLD PEACE
UNIVERSITY | PUNE



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Rahul Vishwanath Karad
Executive President

Ref: IR/WPU/285/20-21

September 21, 2020

Condolence Message

It was with shock and immense grief that I received the news of passing away of Swami Agnivesh Ji on 11 Sep 20. I had the rare privilege and honour to not only have met him on many occasions but also knowing him personally and conversing with him on subjects of mutual interest. It is very awe inspiring to see the wide panorama of social activities Swami Ji had been involved in. From Badhua Mukti Morcha, to campaign against female foeticide, to propnecy of inter faith dialogue, and several other initiatives span a huge landscape of his service to the society.

In Swami Ji's death the nation has lost a true fighter and sections of our society, a benevolent parent.

We pray to the God to grant eternal bliss to the departed soul and Rest Him in Peace.

In grief,

Rahul V. Karad



S. No. 126, Paid Road, Kothrud, Pune-411038 (Maharashtra) India. Tel: +91 20 25703639 | Mob: +91 9850667995, 98505003967, 9881236543
Email: ir@mitwpu.edu.in | Web Site: www.mitwpu.edu.in | bharatyachhatrasnaad.org
mitsoq.org | nationalteachernooningress.com | nationalwomenparliament.org | bharatamila.com
MIT World Peace University is the flagship University of MAEPF's MIT Group of Institutes with over 3000 Faculty, 60000 Students and more than 100,000 Alumni all over the world.



Dr. Geraldine Schwartz and Dr. Desmond Berghofer

Co-Founders
Visioneers International Network
Web of Good Work and Virtual Expo

www.thevisioneers.ca
gerischwartz@thevisioneers.ca
desmond@thevisioneers.ca



September 10th, 2020

Dear Swami Agnivesh,

We urgently pray for your recovery. We know that you do your work as a natural extension of who you are, without any expectation of reward, since the work itself and the outcome for its recipients is reward enough.

At the same time, others, inspired by your example of the work itself, or healed by your ministries, internalize the ideas profoundly and extend the work beyond your knowledge by their own new foundability and energy. In this way, you add to humanity's reservoir of human goodness. It is this human resource that the Visioneers project is tapping into by showing examples of yourself and others.

We will show case and celebrate your body of work on our Virtual Expo and in the Visioneers Master Works Emporium of the Great Works of Our Time, but this Award Certificate is for you, to tell you how much of an impact you are having and how much your work is appreciated. Put it in your home in a place of honour, so you can see every day how much, you, your work, and the spirit you bring to life is valued by your peers, friends and colleagues. It is meant to engender a secret smile and encourage you to continue.

Thank you for your service to humanity. We offer you the Visioneers Lifetime Achievement Award as a Hero of Humanity www.thevisioneers.ca/heroes-and-heroines-of-humanity

We look forward to incorporating your works as we build the Web of Good Work to become a powerful impetus for spreading goodness in the world.

May you receive the great blessings you so richly deserve.
Sincerely, in friendship,

Geraldine Schwartz PhD

Co-Founder

Visioneers International Network

www.thevisioneers.ca

President

International Foundation of Learning

www.internationalfoundationoflearning.com

www.internationalfoundationoflearning.com

Desmond Berghofer PhD

Co-Founder

Visioneers International Network

www.thevisioneers.ca

Chairman

International Foundation of Learning

Vienna, 18 September 2020

KAICIID Secretary General's tribute to Swami Agnivesh

Please accept the deepest condolences of the staff and board of the International Dialogue Centre (KAICIID) on the passing of Swami Agnivesh. As a former member of our Board of Directors, Swami Agnivesh touched all our lives, and we learned a great deal from him on our shared journey to promote interreligious dialogue around the world. He will be deeply missed by us, and by the many thousands of friends and colleagues who mourn him around the world. He is remembered fondly and often by all of us who had the privilege to know him.

Today, on Swamiji's birth date, and the International Day of Peace, let us remember his commitment to peace and non-violence, his unwavering dedication to justice and truth, and his long decades of service to the most deprived, most marginalised among us. Whatever happened, Swamiji never doubted that a better world was possible. He never doubted that people from all faiths, all cultures, all countries could live together in peace and harmony. And he spent his life working to make that possible.

The greatest tribute we can pay to Swamiji's memory, is to ensure that his mission lives on. May he rest in peace, secure in the knowledge that his work will continue.

Faisal bin Muaammar
Secretary General

KAICIID Mourns Loss of Swami Agnivesh



Swami Agnivesh, a tireless activist on behalf of the poor and marginalised and a former Board Member of the International Dialogue Centre (KAICIID) has passed away aged 80 after succumbing to illness.

Swami Agnivesh, a tireless activist on behalf of the poor and marginalised and a former Board Member of the International Dialogue Centre (KAICIID) has passed away aged 80 after succumbing to illness.

Swami Agnivesh, who campaigned for women's rights and against issues such as bonded labour, female foeticide and the treatment of the so-called "untouchables" in his native India, was a passionate advocate of interreligious dialogue, pointing always to the common strands among religious traditions defending the fundamental dignity of all human beings and the overriding need for equal rights.

Faisal bin Muaammar, Secretary General of KAICIID, mourned the loss of "a dear friend and dialogue advocate:

I am deeply saddened by the passing of Swami Agnivesh, whom I worked alongside for years promoting interreligious dialogue and world peace. He will be missed, but all we have learned from his journey will remain with us as we continue our mission," bin Muaammar said.

Throughout a life characterised by deep spirituality and social and political activism, Swami Agnivesh was President Emeritus, World Council of Arya Samaj, Chairperson of the Bonded Labour Liberation Front and Founder and Coordinator of the Parliament of All Faiths. He was awarded the Right Livelihood award, known as the

Alternative Nobel, in 2004 for his work in social justice. Born part of an Orthodox Hindu family, he later obtained Law and Business Management degrees, lectured in Kolkata and practised law.

He began his association with the Hindu reformist Arya Samaj in 1968 before renouncing worldly possessions and becoming Swami Agnivesh. He served as Chairperson of the United Nations Voluntary Trust Fund on Contemporary Forms of Slavery from 1994 to 2004.

Swami Agnivesh was committed to dialogue as a lived principle and was known among those who lived and worked with him for his dynamism in seeking out opportunities to speak with, and on behalf of, those who are different, excluded or marginalised by society. His life, and work, were an embodiment of the ancient Sanskrit adage, "Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam", "the world is one family."

As a member of the first Board of Directors of KAICIID, Swami Agnivesh was instrumental in pioneering this unique institution. In Board meetings, he proved to be a powerful advocate for a continued focus on the grassroots, on the marginalised and dispossessed, for women, young people, and indigenous communities everywhere.

Friday, September 11, 2020



World Constitution and Parliament Association (WCPA)

Promoting the Constitution for the Federation of Earth as our global social contract since 1991.

Organizer for Sessions of the Provisional World Parliament Cooperating with the Institute On World Problems
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WCPA was founded in 1958 by Philip and Margaret Isely

In Memory of Swami Agnivesh from WCPA



Swami Agnivesh ji speaking at BWP Conference on 10 Dec 2019

Swami Agnivesh was a Distinguished Advisor and Vice-President of the World Constitution and Parliament Association (WCPA). He was a prominent spokesperson for the *Constitution for the Federation of Earth* within India. His embrace of our work and the *Earth Constitution* during the past five years derived directly from his spiritual realization of the oneness of God with both our world and our human condition.

Swami wore the saffron robes of Indian religious leaders. Yet his realization was free of all dogma, doctrine, or ritual. He was free of all partisanship and exclusivity. Swami Agnivesh practiced exactly what he wrote about in his books, which he called



“a radical idea of worship.” That radical idea included the “willingness to see what is good and valuable in everyone and everything.” He called this willingness “love.” He wrote: “Only in the light of love can others be known truly and justly. Such knowledge arises out of engaging each other with openness and humility.” Swami Agnivesh wore the saffron robes of the religious men of India. However, he simply lived the life of a “great souled one,” a Mahatma, which requires neither robes nor dogma. Like Gandhi, he embraced everyone equally while at the same time speaking truth to power, never remaining silent in the face of injustice, discrimination, and domination.

His “radical idea of religion” included the dedication to transforming society. One could not be authentically religiously awakened, for Swami, unless one engaged in the dynamic of social transformation: demonstrating, organizing, speaking out, being arrested, placing one’s body and soul on the line to stop injustice. “The competitive and isolationist models of religion,” he wrote, “have failed to bear witness to God’s passion for justice in the world.”

Both Swami’s passion for justice and his openness to embracing the unity in diversity of all people, led him to embrace the *Earth Constitution* as soon as he encountered this work of WCPA in 2015. Since that time, he helped lead the way for WCPA in India, finding locations for our meetings, hosting visitors, telling large audiences about the *Earth Constitution*, and serving on many occasions as our keynote speaker for WCPA Conferences.

He understood immediately that the ideal of *vasudhaiva kutumbakam*, the world as one family, needs concrete embodiment in the form of institutions dedicated to actualizing that ideal. He understood that the *Earth Constitution* is a key element for uniting humanity, politically, economically, and civilizational so that the principle of unity in diversity becomes a living reality.

For Swami Agnivesh, this is what it would be for God to become fully present within human life. Yet the *Earth Constitution* does not even mention the word “God,” and it need not do so from Swami’s point of view. He wrote: “In order to worship God I don’t have to go to any temple and I don’t have to worship any particular God or Goddess or perform any ritual. I just have to be more loving, more compassionate, more just.” This was the Swami Agnivesh as we experienced at WCPA: embracing the entire world in all its unity in diversity, and working to bring the love at the heart of this world to actualization through ratifying the *Constitution for the Federation of Earth*.

Swami Agnivesh will always live in our memory. He is a fundamental part of our WCPA history, and we will never forget his immense contributions to our common human future.

Glen T Martin
President

World Constitution and Parliament Association

President

Dr. Glen T. Martin, USA

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Women’s Empowerment

Dr. Vijaya Murthy, India

Environmental Minister

Mr. S. D. Vijayan, India



॥ इदं श्रेष्ठं ज्योतिषां ज्योतिरगात् ॥

गुरुकुल प्रभात आश्रम

भोलाझालम्, टीकरी, मयराष्ट्रम्- २५०५०१, उत्तरप्रदेशः, दूरभाषः-९७५८७४७९२०
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दिनांक- १२-०९-२०२०

स्वामी अग्निवेश जी के प्रति श्रद्धाञ्जलि

आदरणीय बिट्टलराव जी,

सादर नमस्ते !

कल शाम ७:३० बजे आदरणीय स्वामी अग्निवेश जी महाराज के देहावसान का दुःखद समाचार मुझे सुनने को मिला। पूज्य स्वामी समर्पणानन्द सरस्वती जी महाराज के कारण मेरा उनसे घनिष्ठ सम्बन्ध था। वे प्रायः पूज्य स्वामी जी महाराज के दर्शनार्थ आया करते थे। स्वामी अग्निवेश जी एक समर्पित एवं संघर्षशील व्यक्ति थे। वे विगत कतिपय दिनों से रूग्णशय्या पर थे, इसी बीच मेरे पास उनका दूरभाष आया था तथा मेरी उनसे लम्बी बात भी हुई थी। उस समय ऐसा प्रतीत ही नहीं हो रहा था कि वे इतने शीघ्र हम सबको छोड़कर चले जायेंगे। आज उनका इस प्रकार से अकस्मात् चले जाना अत्यन्त दुःखद है। गुरुकुल के सभी सदस्यों ने उनको कल मौन-श्रद्धाञ्जली अर्पित की तथा उनकी आत्मा की सद्गति के लिए १०८ गायत्री का जाप एवं आज प्रातः 'पुरुषसूक्त' के मन्त्रों से आहुतियाँ भी प्रदान की। परमपिता परमेश्वर दिवङ्गत आत्मा को सद्गति तथा उनके कार्यभारों को सम्भालने के लिए सभी को शक्ति प्रदान करें।

शेष दयामय प्रभु की अपार दया !

बलमसि बलं मयि धेहि ॥

रवि चकानन्द

स्वामी विवेकानन्द सरस्वती

कुलाधिपति, गुरुकुल प्रभात आश्रम

टीकरी, भोला-झाल, मेरठ (उ.प्र.)



19.09.2020

IN MEMORY OF SWAMI AGNIVESH

It is with the heaviest of hearts, that we mourn the passing of Swami Agnivesh, a tireless voice for human dignity and humanitarian values. He was a guiding light who committed an entire lifetime to upholding fundamental rights entitled to all by virtue of being human such as the Right to Life & Livelihoods and Freedom of Speech, especially of Dalit, Bahujan and Adivasi communities. He has armed many countless generations of human rights advocates with weapons of non-violence towards creating a more egalitarian world where substantial equality matches formal equality.

Swami Agnivesh, has lived an exemplary life, steeped in practicing the principles that he has upheld through his lifetime, of emancipation for the most marginalised communities. Our organisation Keystone Foundation - working with indigenous communities in the Nilgiris Biosphere Reserve, with networks in other tribal regions of the country - takes great inspiration from the life and work of Swami Agnivesh and hopes to be one of his torchbearers in the struggles ahead.

Swami Agnivesh (1939 – 2020), through his life transcended his socio-geographical contexts, and developed deep empathy for the struggles of communities which are underrepresented in power structures. He fused progressive and radical ideas of rights-based discourses with spiritual underpinnings, finding a balance between the material and metaphysical. He demonstrated that faith and spirituality did not have to occupy dogmatic realms in polity, and that it was possible to fight obscurantism in mainstream society driven by religious values through social reform and peoples' participation, by upholding secular values which were tenets of the Indian constitution. His embracing of the reformist spiritualism of the Arya Samaj and the Dialectical Materialism of Neo-Marxism & Liberation Theology allowed him to merge both worlds in his socio-political understandings.

His commitment to social causes was at the forefront of his public life, even in circumstances when it earned him ire from the political establishments. He was a vocal advocate of protection of marginalised communities, whether it was through the Narmada Bachao Andolan, Beti Bacho Andolan, peace talks with the Maoists, support for the reading down of Article 377, tireless promotion of inter-faith dialogues and numerous other peoples' movements. His steadfast commitment to equality and freedom reflected in his work towards securing the dignity of communities and in his opposition to injustice and communalism.

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Bandhua Mukti Morcha has been an inspiration for countless grassroots organisations that have worked with vulnerable indigenous groups, who have suffered the vagaries and political apathy towards their life, labour and livelihoods. He knew how to work within constitutional structures, as well as challenge them when needed. He was a luminary who taught us the value of inculcating the true democratic spirit of an active and conscientious citizenry. The measure of his impact on knowledge discourses in India can be seen in his substantial influence on the shape of legal landscapes in India, and the adopting of strategies by peoples' movements to assert their rights and identities.

He also took up many philanthropic and humanitarian initiatives, ranging from Chhattisgarh to Haryana, Tamil Nadu to Assam. He was adept at using his knowledge of the socio-legal system in India and negating powerful lobbies through democratic action and mobilising public opinion.

As we seek ways to come to terms with the immeasurable loss of such a tall leader, it will be nothing less than the truth to state here that millions of Indians have lost a moral guide, a tireless voice for human dignity with the loss of our beloved Swami Agnivesh. The best we can perhaps do to overcome our grief would be to carry forth his principles, his spirit, and spread the message of love and compassion for the most downtrodden by participating, giving a voice and being inclusive to their concerns in every aspect of our lives. The whole world stands diminished without his calming presence and kind encouragement in the face of adversity.

Swami Agnivesh will always have a special place in our hearts as we stare at the uncertain times ahead. He has inspired our organisation, Keystone Foundation, to continue our efforts towards securing environmental and socio-economic justice for the communities and citizens here in the Nilgiris. We had the great honour of receiving Swami Agnivesh in our office campus last year when he visited to advise us on some environmental Public Interest Litigation we were considering to pursue. He was very quick and incisive with his counsel. Such losses are always difficult to comprehend and leaves us in a lonely place. Words and gestures cannot express how much he will be missed by us, his legacy will no doubt have a lasting impact on the lives of millions of us.

Yours sincerely,



Pratim Roy

Founder Director

Keystone Foundation



Arya Samaj leader Swami Agnivesh :

Swami Agnivesh had a passion for justice

- Janine Moodley Durban-



A FIERY, fearless and vocal leader who fought for the rights and dignity for all. This was how many people described Swami Agnivesh, a social activist and former Arya Samaj leader, following his death on Friday, aged 80.

Agnivesh died at the Institute of Liver and Biliary Sciences in New Delhi, India, due to multiple organ failure. He had liver cirrhosis and was on a ventilator. According to a historical account of his life's journey on swamiagnivesh.com, Agnivesh studied law and commerce but he became a full-time worker at the Arya Samaj in 1968. Two years later, here nounced all material possessions and relationships-earning him the title of Swami. He later for meda, political party, Arya Sabha, based on Arya Samaj principles.

In 1975, he went underground after the ruling party began targeting opposing parties. He was soon arrested and was jailed for 14 months. After the 1977 elections, he became education minister in India but he was soon asked to resign after he launched a judicial inquiry into his own government. In 1981, he founded the Bonded Labour Liberation Front, which he still headed before he died. The liberation front fought for the rights of workers.

Swami Vedanand Saraswati, spiritual head of the Arya Samaj South Africa, who shared a close bond with Agnivesh, spoke of trips to India where he witnessed bonded labour. "We saw women, men and children working in the quarries, digging, breaking and loading stones; a humanity reduced to and treated as beasts of burden. We had the unforgettable heart-wrenching experience of interacting with children rescued from child labour by the organisation's activists." Saraswati said he cried when he saw children in suffering and bearing burn scars from heated ironrods as punishment. "They were from Biharand, being a descendant of indentured labourers from Bihar, I listened to their exploitation and relived their human tragedy through the trials and tribulations of my forebears.

"Throughout the years, Agnivesh also encouraged dialogue between religions and was a social activist who

campaigned for, among others, women's rights. During his frequent visits to South Africa, Saraswati said a special relationship developed with Agnivesh and the people of the country." "He leaves us with such treasured memories of active engagement in the struggle for human rights in this country, which he inspired in all of us. "Saraswati reminisced on the first trip Agnivesh took to South Africa many years ago. "He saw the Girmitya Diaspora in South Africa descendants of bonded labourers, and realised how deep-rooted the plight and fight for the rights of the oppressed was in the history of India, and the global consequences of such social injustice." Agnivesh, at one point, visited a rural village in the outskirts of Pietermaritzburg and met with the locals. "I watched him play and dance with the village folk and their children.

In the midst of their suffering, they were able to celebrate life and Swamiji was delighted to be a part of that simple happiness and joy. "During one of his trips, Saraswati said he also visited Parliament, where he met senior government officials." He was a warrior who not only shaped my life personally but countless others, who were called to serve the cause of the people. His life was his message to stand for truth and justice.

"Bisraam Rambhass, president of the Arya Samaj South Africa, said Agnivesh spared no effort in convincing the Arya Samaj, other Hindu organisations, and all Indian South Africans that they needed to commit to the new democracy in South Africa. "As faith-based leaders, it was imperative that we ensured the pillars of the emerging new nation were based on fundamental human rights. "The government must be guided by a moral and ethical compass, and faith-based organisations need to help steer the government to avoid it veering from this path." It is only with the onset of the corruption, at the hands of some ruthless leaders of the ANC government, that we realise how prophetic Swamiji's advice was. "Ashwin Trikanjee, president of the South African Hindu Maha Sabha, described Agnivesh as a fearless exponent of justice." Swami Agnivesh had a passion for justice and righteousness. He actively campaigned for human rights of the poor and downtrodden. He promoted the rights of women and exposed the evils of child and bonded labour. "Trikanjee said he remembered when, during a visit to the country, Agnivesh pushed for religious tolerance and peaceful co-existence." Swami Agnivesh argued that for the world order to be one of peace and justice, it was imperative that a new and proactive spiritual vision-commensurate to the challenges of the emerging world order-be enunciated without delay."

Swami Agnivesh : How One Hindu Monk's "Inner Evolution" Fuels Social Justice Work

(This article was originally published in The Christian Science Monitor, with the support of CRCC's global project on engaged spirituality)

- Soumya Shankar
Posted 6th July, 2020

This past November, in a small hamlet in the Indian state of Haryana, several dozen activists from around the country gathered to discuss how to achieve world peace.

The state of affairs was looking grim, with populist movements fanning out across democracies. And in India too, the largest minority group, Muslims, was being demonized by a rising Hindu right.

Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, the activists called their meeting—the ancient Sanskrit adage meaning “the world is one family.”

The group was convened by Swami Agnivesh, a Hindu monk clothed head-to-toe in saffron, who is also a renowned social activist. At 80, the swami (meaning one who has control over the “self”) is a truly eclectic figure—clothed and steeped in tradition, yet defiant of it in many ways.

“The real seekers were the prophets, not priests,” Mr. Agnivesh tells me, perched on a hard, rustic cot in a room empty apart from the bare essentials—the cot, some towels, a few identical saffron robes, a chair, and a table strewn with books. There is no air conditioning for the sweltering hot months, no heat or hot water for the cold months that sweep through northern India.

“The priest is a follower and the prophet is a rebel and revolutionary,” Mr. Agnivesh continues. “That’s what attracted me to this path—the prophet and the revolutionary character.”

Over the years, Mr. Agnivesh has been many things: an anti-corruption activist, a prisoner, and a politician. He’s negotiated with Maoist rebels, campaigned against sex-selective abortion, and headed the World Council of Arya Samaj, a Hindu reformist movement. But he’s best known for his work for interfaith tolerance, and his organization Bandhua Mukti Morcha (BMM), or the Bonded Labour Liberation Front.

Nearly 8 million people are thought to live in modern slavery in India today, according to the Global Slavery Index. Bonded labor has been outlawed for decades, but the practice persists in industries like brick kilns, quarries, and carpet factories. Many victims are children, and lower-caste Hindus, whose families are trapped by debt. Through BMM, Mr. Agnivesh and fellow activists say they have released more than 200,000 workers and helped to rehabilitate them. Three times, he has served as chair of the United Nations Voluntary Trust Fund on Contemporary Forms of Slavery.

A personal journey

The monk’s spiritual life feeds his political and social rebellion—each one a long process of transformation.

Born Vepa Shyam Rao into an upper-caste Brahmin family from southern India, Mr. Agnivesh grew up following traditional Hindu rituals. While attending college in Kolkata, he discovered the Arya Samaj movement, which emphasizes the ancient Vedas, the oldest scriptures in Hinduism, over later traditions. It “was all very universal, very transformative,” he recalls.

What he calls his “inner evolution” continued as he taught at Kolkata’s St. Xavier’s College, where he worked alongside Jesuits. “I was very critical of Christian missionaries. I’d accuse them of trying to convert our poor tribal people and try to instigate a Christian state here,” he says. Yet his views shifted as he got a glimpse of their simple way of life: “A small bed. Minimal eating.”

“These people worked here in the dust and pollution, whereas I was wondering if I should leave this country and lead a good comfortable life in the U.S.? No!” Mr. Agnivesh says. “I asked myself what my mission was and realized I had none. So I decided, even though I am not a missionary, I must have a mission.” This was the moment, Mr. Agnivesh recalls, that he decided to become a monk.

Yet he also made a name for himself in Haryana’s politics, and was even jailed—long with much of the opposition—by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi during the two-year “Emergency” in the 1970s, remembered for its civil liberties abuses. Afterward, he was elected to the state legislature and became minister for education. But he soon quit and threw himself full time into freeing bonded workers, founding the BMM in 1981.

Much of his activism has focused on tolerance, at a time when there is fear both inside and outside India that religious freedom is diminishing sharply, particularly for Muslims. In May, the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom designated India a country “of particular concern,” noting “government action ... created a culture of impunity for nationwide campaigns of harassment and violence against religious minorities.” For years, Mr. Agnivesh has led efforts to defuse tension after Hindu-Muslim clashes, and denounce leadership he considers responsible for failing to halt attacks—including that of current Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

But tolerance within a faith, his advocacy underscores, is just as important as tolerance between them. For decades, he has led campaigns to change practices within Hindu culture that he sees as unequal toward women or Dalits, the people lowest in the caste hierarchy, such as his effort to secure the entry of so called untouchables into Hindu temples.

What next?

As much as Mr. Agnivesh's career is multifaceted, his lifestyle is simple. The monk does not own property and has little money in the bank. Yet he has inspired social workers and activists of all likes in India. Manohar Manav, a local activist from the state of Bihar, spent 10 years as the swami's pupil. Also born into an upper-caste family, Mr. Manav says he was compelled to drop his last name—a signifier of one's caste—after hearing the swami speak. He adopted the caste-agnostic title Manav, which literally means “human.”

“When a person rises from religion towards spirituality, he situates himself in a bigger striving,” says Mr. Manav, who is now director of the BMN. “Then there is no Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Buddhist, or Christian. This vision was given to me by Swamiji.”

Frequently, the monk has come under attack from a resurgent right-wing Hindu nationalist movement, opposed to his criticisms of what he considers “dogmatic” practices—and his visible work on Hindu-Muslim solidarity, at a time when many gurus seem to endorse the ruling party's “Hindutva” ideology. In 2018, as he was working with marginalized communities in the eastern state of Jharkhand, groups affiliated with the ruling party protested against him, and a mob assaulted him, hitting him until he fell into a lump on the ground. The assailants accused him of being sympathetic to Christian missionaries and proselytizing to local tribes.

But fear is not a factor for the monk, he says. “I am a threat because I am showing them a mirror,” he says. “I am telling them that the religion or gods of Hinduism that you are talking about is not this; you are perverting and corrupting it. You are bringing shame on Hinduism.”

Eventually, he shares the concern that bites him the most.

“Sometimes, I feel, who will take my work forward? I am not completely sure about that,” he says. So, should he have designated a successor? “No, I have seen that no prophet's children have truly taken their work forward. No one has.”

(Click here to read the article on csmonitor.com.

***Saumya Shankar** is a journalist fellow with the*

Spiritual Exemplars Project.)

Transcript of video message from Mr. Gerald Daly, UN Resident Coordinator of Bhutan

With Swami ji's passing, a great light has left our lives. And now we have the opportunity to rekindle the light of a great teacher in our hearts and in our souls.

Swamiji was a 21st century man for all seasons, and I was fortunate to have had a professional time with Swamiji and also a personal time. Professionally we worked to get her on 2 projects. The first one was back in early 2001 on the Food Insecurity Atlas of India when I was with the World Food Programme.

Swami ji was never afraid to ask the tough questions—that we need, so that our planet can create a system of sustainability. The second time when we worked together professionally, was last year in August of 2019 when he came to Bhutan. And it was part of what is called the Bhutan Dialogues when he gave a magnificent speech. In doing so, he did it with our local teacher, Dr. Karma Phuntsho. And it was a memorable August session of Bhutan Dialogues.

And I look back and realise it was not so much the content of that session but rather Swamiji's presence, aura and energy that radiated throughout that session. Your name Swami Agnivesh most truly befits the embodiment of fire and that came through so clearly in that Bhutan Dialogues. I am aware of my inadequacies when it comes to language. But two words stand out for me when I think of Swamiji and both of them are Sanskrit in roots. One of them is Dayaalu and the other is Lokapal. And I am sure, while many great people have come from the great state of Andhra,

Swamiji will be remembered as one of the greatest pearls from the great state of Andhra. I want to say thank you for giving us this opportunity to say these few words today and remember with great sadness the passing of a great light from our world.

Kadinchela

POWER OF LOVE :

VASUDAIVA KUTUMBIKAM

(Inaugural address delivered at the International Conference on Community Empowerment
: Copping, Resilience and Hope)

- by Swami Agnivesh ji

A very very warm hearty welcome to all our friends from practically all over the globe. All over the world. It's like a mini human family meeting here. And what we need to celebrate is "*Vasudaiva Kutumbikam*". It is a very very ancient concept. You may call it Vedic concept found in the Upanishads in the Vedas. It's called Vasudaiva Kutumbikam. It means the whole universe or the whole world, a family. I'll come back to that but I'm really grateful to Prof. Venkat, Prof. Radha, Prof.

Srikakulam area and when I lost my father at the age of 4, I was brought up [by my maternal grandfather who was the Divan, like a Prime Minister of a Princely state. So he brought me up but since he was also very devoted to worshipping gods and goddesses all sorts of things, he built this separate room for, a sort of a temple room for the house. So I would follow suit like a young child, a 5, 6, 7 year old, and worship all those gods and goddesses, multiple—so many heads and so many



Bharath Bhushan, Prof. P Balagopal and each one of you, my friends, that you gave me this unique honor to be present and you have given me this honor to share my views, my work which I have been engaged in for the last 48 years. Voluntary work dedicated for social causes, for the uplift of the weakest of the weak, of the poorest of the poor, the most defenseless, the most voiceless in this part of the world. Much as I was inspired by the teachings of the Vedas and the Upanishads, I started my journey on a different note altogether.

My childhood days were difficult and different. I was born to an very orthodox family of Andhra Pradesh, this part of the country, Telugu speaking,

different faces etcetera. And as a child I would have childish questions to ask, which I was never answered. I was told rather to shut up. "Why has this God got three heads not one? And how does he use the pillow when he goes to bed?" So, funny questions. "How does this god look like an elephant and another looks like a lion and another one looks like a monkey ? In what language do they talk to each other?" Then I would be told to shut up don't talk nonsense about Gods. And I would be very afraid of demons or bhoot, ghosts, going to bed at night I would be told to recite Hanuman Chalisa, to praise lord Hanuman so he would protect me. Then I would start to recite and my other brothers and sisters would tell me to recite



this on their behalf also so I would do it five times. So very early in life I got to know that in the world of religion there is a certain department where you don't have to do things for yourself but others can do things for you and you can derive the benefit.

Now I realize that the whole World of religion, or all the world's religions, the organized ritualized with religious superstitions and dogmas and miracle mongering, are all the time, rather overtime busy praying for others, praying to save the souls and religion is nothing but a multibillion dollar soul saving industry. So it's a quite thriving industry. Anyway, there are many other stories but I would cut it short and then I went over to. No, yeah before that let me tell you that my grandfather's huge lands. He never cultivated it himself, he was like a Chief Minister or Prime Minister. He owned the land but others would cultivate it for him, the landless laborers. And I can still remember their faces. In the evening after sunset they would come and report for the day's work. They would never venture into the main area where we would live. They would be out there in the court yard. And very poor,



emaciated, dark skinned working whole day in sun. And then taking pity on them, my elders would tell me "okay they are very poor. Go and give them this left over food or something—clothes. And invariably they will tell me in my ears, "Don't touch them; just throw it at them". I would ask them "Why?" "You will have to take bath you will have to change your clothes" and "Why?" "Because they are untouchables." So I would go very dutifully and throw it at them and then run away lest I would touch and then commit some sort of a sin. That was my childhood days.

Coming back every day from the school, I had no father so mother was all I had so I'd throw my bag and go and sit in my mother's lap and she would comfort me for a few minutes and then I would go to play. But on certain days every month, three days, I would be told "No no, you will not go to your mother." And why? We tell you this is our religion this is our custom this is our tradition, you have to keep to our custom. You will not go and touch your mother." And why? They would tell me you will have to take a shower, and change your clothes. Any why? "is my mother also untouchable?"



“Yes, for these three days she is untouchable. She’s sitting out there in the out house. I was not allowed to go. I would ask this question why every time my mother is untouchable every month ? Never my uncle ? Why is my elder sister untouchable every month but never my elder brother ? No answers. You have to accept it. This is ritual, this is our tradition this is religion. And matters of religion, no questioning.

So that was how I was brought up till the age of 17, I went to Kolkata for my higher education, because nobody was to pay for my education I had to earn my own. So, morning classes, evening classes in the big metropolitan city, I went there. And there I met with a very powerful movement; reform movement called Arya Samaj which taught me about the Vedas, which



brought me in touch with Swami Dayanand Saraswathi who was quite a rebel and who rebelled against or revolted against all of these religions and all of these so called rituals and dogmas and everything everything, and he inspired me most. He taught me some basic three lessons. I mean he was not there, he was poisoned to death at the age of 59 in 1883 for his unorthodox, for his rebellious ideas he was killed, 1883. But he inspired me most. And why ? Because he taught me to question. Question everything. Question authority, scriptural authority or leaders authority, or who ever who ever—Guru’s authority, prophets’ authority, all authorities need to be questioned. And I learnt at the age of 17, 18, these beautiful 3 Ds: to doubt, to debate and if necessary, to dissent. Sorry I don’t agree. So three Ds became very integral to my college, university days, and I completed my M.Com, LLB, I was teaching business management and Law in St. Xavier’s College,

Kolkata, practicing Law in Kolkata High Court and gave up everything in 1968 to work among the poorest of the poor in this country to bring about revolution, to bring about social change. Now nothing of that sort has materialized, rather things have gone, uh, from bad to worse. But I am sharing my dream and I’m sharing whatever I have to share with you in terms of the ideology.

Just now a beautiful hymn was sung here from the Vedas :

samgacchu-dhwam samvadadhvam

May I recite it once again ? Why I am reciting is, it is a beautiful, beautiful, millennia ago, how many thousands and thousands of year ago this was composed, or sung, we don’t know. But the meaning is very profound. It says, let’s all of us, human beings live a one family, irrespective of our caste, creed, color whatever, whatever nationality, as one family, one human family

مؤتمر حوار الحضارات و الثقافات

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and we should walk together, talk together, and walk the talk together collectively and share the bounties of mother earth collectively, in the spirit of sharing and caring. Not in terms of personal aggrandizement, or exploiting the others. And the ownership of all means of production should be community based. Community ownership. That's what struck me most. So I love this hymn, this mantra. And when I saw the beautiful theme of this conference, community empowerment, resilience, and coping, hope, it is very very appropriate for this Vedic mantra. It talks of a new paradigm altogether, a spiritual paradigm, you can say, a paradigm of sharing and caring and living simply. Gandhiji said that we should all live simply so that others can simply live. In times of grave crises like this, when 40000 children are dying of starvation every day, on this planet earth. 40000 children are dying every day. We need to think up and think about something—a new paradigm of sharing and caring.

*sangachadhvam samvadadhvam sam vo
manamsi janatam | deva bhagam yatha purve
saijanana upasate ||*

*samano mantraha samithi samani
samanam manaha sachchita meSham
samanam mantramabhimantaye vah
samaneva vo havi Sha juhomi ||*

Thank you, thank you.

Now I feel challenged everytime I meet people from other parts of the world, and when I am called upon to share my own experiences, I find that a person who renounced any of these organized religions, though he puts up the appearance of a religious person-I look like a religious person. And I am chanting thee Veda mantras. And invariably, I mean if I allow myself to become a guru, then you can see hundreds and thousands of my followers. I don't have a single follower. I only make friends, comrades. Because followers means blind followers. They don't think for themselves, they all follow. So we don't need sheep we need human beings with their own brains to think and decide.

Now when we talk of a development paradigm, and to talk about community empowerment, and hope and resilience and coping, what is the most important



thing? After coming to this room and looking at this team etcetera, this came up to my mind. The most

important thing is community ownership of the means of production and distribution. And this is what is being threatened. World wide. Worldwide and particularly into his country where the largest number of tribal people live. The indigenous people in the world. They have been uprooted, they have been hunted, they have been you know, disadvantaged, disenfranchised in their own land for no fault of theirs by us, by people like us who are more civilized or so called civilized. We went to civilize them so went to kill them we went to grab them and we usurped all their natural resources. Land mineral wealth, water resources, forest wealth, everything, everything. And they have been dispossessed. You might have seen the famous film, “Avataar”. How many of you have seen that film? Wow, quite a few. And when I was going to Bastar in the Chhattisgarh area. It’s considered to be Maoist or Naxalite infested, the left wing extremist area, I had gone there once inside to bring back 5 soldiers who had been kidnapped by these extremists and they had kept them in their captivity for 18 long days. And parents and Governments and Central Government, they had all lost hope. Till I got a phone call and they said “Swamiji, can you come? And we will hand over these soldiers to you.” I was surprised. And then I went with my colleagues, very committed, and some media people and deep inside the forest, the Maoists they gave me a guard of honor with their guns and everything and then they handed over those 5 soldiers. So while I was walking in those

forests, there was a reporter from Times of India and I was talking to her and I said they don’t.

James Cameroon didn’t have to invent another planet, um? To bring these people there from the earth and then show them how the other planet has got mineral wealth and that is being plundered. That’s the basic story. He could easily have come to this Bastar or Chhattisgarh in India. And for seeing with his naked eyes, exactly the same thing happening day in and day out. Hundreds and thousands of them are being displaced. Hundreds and thousands of them are being killed and sort of a cultural and other genocide taking place today in our country. You are very close. Sitting in Hyderabad it is not very far away from the scene where I’ve been working for quite sometime.

So friends, the world over—go to Latin America, go to, Africa, you will find most of these poor people, hard working they are being uprooted from their own home and hearth and we are talking about a development paradigm, uh big cities and metro cities and smart cities and what not. So we should ask ourselves, “Who are important?” Are the people important or are our ideas important, our academics are important. If only people mattered then we should feel humbled and ask ourselves “what can we learn from these so-called uncivilized people?” Instead of trying to civilize them we should try to learn something from them. Even now in my country they own the land collectively. It’s not a government established institution but land ownership among them is all collective. And their sharing and caring lifestyle. Simple lifestyle. Even if you give them lot of



wealth, they don't know how to use it. If you bring them to this hotel in Hyderabad, they will feel very very uneasy, not comfortable. What's that?

Long ago I was invited to Canada. My first ever visit to...only visit and that too, I got down in Edmonton Airport and from there I was driven 8 hours deep into the forest and the natives there. They welcomed me and I spent some 6, 7 days there. Red Indians. And I could see so much of similarity between those Red Indians and our people here. The same traditions, the same link with the nature and simple living, and sharing, caring and everything. And when I went to Australia, to Brisbane, very close to your place and deep into the forest and Melbourne and many other places where I have got many of my friends from the aborigine communities, I went to New Zealand, met the Maoris. Every where I find the same. They don't have any internet, they don't have any mobile phone sit don't know if they have some of them but here is a human culture, a human culture. We are destroying it and replacing it with a culture of self-aggrandizement, plunder, loot, consumerism—consume, consume and becondemned to consume. Greed has been glorified.

On this note I remember, some 15 years ago the then president of World Bank, James Wolfensohn made his first ever visit to India as the president of World Bank. So he was in New Delhi office, and I was holding a placard on the other side of the street "Go Back" protesting against the World Bank. And I was the part of the demonstration for the Sardar Narmada Sagar

Narmada Bachao Andolan with Medha Patkar and others and we were shouting slogans. But very interestingly, this man, instead of getting annoyed, irritated, he invited us inside his office. First time. Our own ministers would never do that. So he invited us and said "Why are you angry? Why are you protesting?" So then he discussed with us something. A few days later I got an invitation from him to come and talk to him in the World Bank's office, the Head quarter office in Washington DC. He said "Swami we want to know why you are angry with us, why you are protesting against our economic policies on globalization?" I said, "Well I am not against globalization per se but your connotation of globalization is very disturbing. He said "What?" I said we also have a concept of globalization which is called Vasudhaiva Kutumbikam, the whole world is a family, the whole humanity is a family, sharing, caring, etc. cetera. But yours is a market. Market forces where everything is a commodity. Even human relations have been commoditized with a price tag. That's creating a problem. Here the rich and the powerful, they dominate, they dictate, where as in our system of a family, global family, human family, it is the youngest, the weakest in the family, the young little child claims his or her share the first as a matter of right and the bread winner of the family takes his or her share the last. How does it work?" He wanted to understand. I said "well it's difficult for you to understand because it is a spiritual paradigm. Its



not a material paradigm.

Now friends, what is this spiritual paradigm? What is it that connects you and me in this whole universe and this whole world? I don't know if you share this particular concept, the creator concept. There is a creator. You call it divine, call it God, Allah, Vahe Guru, Eshwar, Paramatma, whatever name you like but it has to be universal. And if it is universal then it is bound to be formless. Without form. Un-aging, no birth something like that. So what the Vedas talk about, the God concept where God is eternal, God is all seeing. Omni potent, omni scient omni—whatever you call it Omni present. Such a God is to be worshipped alone. Such a God is to be communed alone. That no other God. And how do you commune with such a God? I told you at the age of 17, 18 when I was looking for my own liberation from those multiple Gods and Goddesses, I was told that I don't have to go anywhere outside to the temple or even one step outside, because God who is omni present, is also present inside of me. My whole body, with hundred trillion cells is pulsating and throbbing every second, every hundredth and thousandth of a second in my own body, hundred trillion cells. I am breathing and I am doing whatever is god's compassion. And god is truth and love and compassion and justice. In god's world and God's universe everyone is equal. The principle of equity and justice works so beautifully, the sun shines equally, black or white, no problem. Rich or poor no problem. No difference, no discrimination.

The waterfalls, the rains, all equal. The air we breathe, in the creation, its all equal.

So God's creation itself is a very very strong message. Very strong message of equity and justice, equality. Of all human beings. We are all born equal, that's what the UN tells us, the UN Charter but we are really not that equal at all. There is inequality, there is discrimination, there is injustice and that's what I call violence. The structural violence is all based on birth. The color of the skin is number one. Gender? In this country, I don't know about your other countries but at least in this country millions and millions of our girl children are being slaughtered every day in their mother's womb for no fault than they being a girl child. They will be born a girl child, they cannot be born like a male child, that's all. And they will be finished. Cut to pieces, and thrown out in the drain. And why? Gender inequality. World over I find... I travel, I find women do not enjoy equality with men. Second class citizens. This is violence. Structural violence. And why? You ask anybody, why? They can't explain but they have been relegated to second class position. The Blacks of the world, they have been denied, human dignity, human right or whatever goes with it. Why? Just the color of the skin. People say "no no no, it's not like that, this and that" I say even now today you take the whole Globe, the UN talks about two types of nations some developing, and others developed. Yes? And you draw a line in between. Developed on the one side and

developing on the other side and you will find invariably, the color of the skin coming out. The developed have got a distinct white color, and those who are still developing have not so white.

So, why? With all the science, technology and the economics and all those people the high academics and all policy makers. Why is it so? This is the reality of the day. And in our country we have got a caste system which is unique to this land and our people. Here the Hindu shave the caste system, you are born into a caste, high or low, you can't wish it away in any way. Your whole life is dictated by this caste system. Social status. I was born into this Brahmin family. I didn't know that I was going to be born a Hindu and born to be a Brahmin. Later on when I realized it, it was something very superficial, I gave it up. I'm no longer a Brahmin, I'm no longer a Hindu, I'm just a human being. That's my decision. How many of you can decide? How many of us in the world can decide? Most of us get born a Hindu or a Muslim or a Christian. Or our nationalities. I was born in Hindustan and the other was born in Pakistan. Then huhh, we are different. Who draws these lines, boundaries? Not god, not the creator. Some clever people do that. Who says women are second class people? Some clever people. Who says caste system? Some clever criminal people. Criminal. They divide us. And then finally, finally comes the rich and the poor.

Millions of children in India and I have been fighting against child slavery. I've been chairperson for 9 years

for the UN trust fund on contemporary forms of slavery in Geneva. And whenever figures would come in front of all our board members, India would be top, number one. Slavery and slavery-like practices, modern slavery, India, top. So I have to end because time is over and we will have some little more time. Q and A, hopefully? Yes? So, I am trying that the world needs a vision. Not this not a vision but a layer, something. A clear vision, a spiritual vision a global vision. Humanity is one family. Vasudaiva Kutumbikam. If only all of you can endorse this vision, then we can work out a paradigm. A paradigm shift. All our discussions and all our voluntary work and everything can become sustainable. Creating more hope and giving more strength to those basic communities. They need hope. For them you need to come up with this vision that we are one, we are one that basically we are one and those who have divided us are all our enemies. Those are all clever criminal people. We are all one and therefore any form of inequality, any form of discrimination, is just not acceptable. Once we say that we are human beings and then we have to love the animals and birds also. It's not that. . we cannot be anthro pocentric world view that we human beings are the supreme creation and the rest are all made for us to gobble and grab and kill them and eat. One billion birds and animals are being killed every day. One billion, everyday. And to feed those cattle and pigs they are clearing the Amazon forest and all all those rain forests and growing soya and corn so that they can be fattened. And the food from the



plate of the children is being taken away that's why 40000 children are dying every day of starvation and the meat industry in the World is flourishing like anything.

So a whole paradigm. What is the paradigm shift?

There is one paradigm. Those who are powerful people, their paradigm I would call "Love of Power". "Love of Power". The politicians, the corporates, the big people, the powerful people. "Love of Power". The other paradigm is you, me, small people, humble people. Our paradigm is "Power of Love". From "Love of Power" to "Power of Love". If only we can make this transition it will be a little more easy, things will become much more holistic. And that will give us hope. Humanity needs hope. We can all of us march together, we can all live together. Gandhiji said, "Mother earth has got enough, enough, enough for each one of us. If you want to meet our needs, there is enough. But if we want to meet our greed, then it is not enough for even one person.

So let us make a need-based society where basic needs of all human beings are met without plundering the nature. Look upon the nature as friend.

Mitrasya, Chakshusa sarvani bhuthaani samikshamahe

Look at all of creation with the eye of a friend and not try to kill and take away and plunder. So these are some of the thoughts which I made, I mean it came spontaneously to me and I've just spoken to you, shared my vision with you. And I'll be here for the whole of the evening and tomorrow morning few hours early hours and then I'll be gone back to my work in Delhi. Thankyou so much.

I've a small book with me, not enough copies but ... It's called "Applied Spirituality". A pro-active dialogue we need to build.

About inclusion of the disabled in the concept of Vasudhaiva Kutumbikam

I really apologize. You know, I include all of our disabled friends, brothers and sisters as part of our human family. So if I was misunderstood, please correct me. Because each one of us, each one of us is equally blessed by our creator. Call the creator by any name or no name no problem but we're all born equal and we have equal claim to there sources of nature, life sustaining nature and everything. So disabled people, we call them Specially Abled people. Differently abled people, not disabled. They are differently abled. They

have got some extra qualities which normal people don't have. So I apologize if I did not make that clear earlier. **How touse and put into practice the concept of love?**

What I mean by this paradigm of love is that whenever we approach a problem, there's a way of approaching. We think the other person deserves some pity, some charity, and religious organizations are very well, very good at organizing this charity into a business. Without taking pity on those poor people, the starving



people, let's ask ourselves who is responsible for their starvation and their hunger or their poverty? There is one type of Social Work; NGOs. All very dedicated and doing lot of good work. Feeding the poor, soup kitchens, I've seen so many of them being run in the United States. People keep all sorts of food, everything outside, out at the door and poor people come and pick them up. So there was an Arch bishop in Latin America. You might have heard about him. Hélder Câmara is his name. It's a beautiful thing to say which I very often quote in my speeches. He said, "When I give bread to the poor, they call me a saint. When I give bread to the poor, they call me a saint. But when I ask why the poor do not have bread they call me a communist." See? What is the difference? It is the poor who are producing the bread. And they are hungry. I work among the brick kiln workers. Brick kiln. And they are baking the bricks, red hot bricks. I tell them it is not just the coal which is being used to burn the bricks; your blood is also being used. That's why the color of the brick is little red. And the poor girl carrying a three four month old child in her bosom, she is climbing those dilapidated stairs, several stairs to build this beautiful beautiful hotel or building or mansion or whatever. And invariably you will never find a single hut or room over their head. Those who build houses for others have no

houses. Those who grow food for others are going hungry. Those who weave clothes for others are without clothes. It's a systemic failure. It's a paradigm failure. This is what I call structural violence. Structural violence. So unless and until doing a little work locally unless you address the global structure of structural violence, you will not be doing your work in the desired way. So you need to understand "Why is this poor person poor, or hungry?"

The structure in some way is responsible, and if you can simultaneously, while feeding the poor you raise questions about those structures then you can overcome poverty sooner than later. Otherwise you will be fighting the shadow and you will never go to the real work or real purpose. So this is what I humbly submit. And Gandhiji understood this very well that's why he talked about a paradigm shift. Buddha understood it very well. All our great. . . Jesus of Nazareth perhaps understood it very well. Each one of them has thrown us. E.F. Schumacher when he talks about "Small is Beautiful". Please read that little small book. It is like a Bible for all of us. I was fascinated when I read it first time ever when I went abroad to a place called Cheng Mai in Thailand and there I read that book it was so fascinating. In 1975 I read that book. So Gandhi, EF Schumacher, so many others. There is no dearth of knowledge, wisdom. Tolstoy, read him and you will find wealth. So all of this is there in abundance but we need to find a working order, a vision of this new paradigm. How do you translate? Being very good at academic studies, you can put them down, break them in steps or whatever, of this is the way to go about.

Empower the people. The community has to be empowered. In our own constitution it talks about Gram Sabha. Gram Sabha means the village community where direct democracy—in our state assemblies or in parliament, it is not direct democracy. There are representatives of the people who are debating and legislating. No. Our constitution talks about a fundamental institution called direct democracy of the people, Gram Sabha. And it is more powerful than state assemblies or parliament. But in real terms they do not have that strength. Giving them strength, real constitutional strength that they own the land of that village. They own the natural resources of the village. And no, nothing can be taken away from them without their consent. That should be fundamental. That's not being practiced. Gandhiji dreamt of millions of village republics in India. Village republics, he called them. Can you imagine? He was such an anarchist. Anarchist, Gandhiji was an anarchist because he talked about village republic—every village, a republic. So he was trying to say that the village people, the community of the village, they are the supreme. Can we give them that type of recognition? Social, economic and political? That's the question. And if you do that I think, I'm sure love means truth and truth means compassion and compassion means justice. It is not just one love. Truth love compassion and justice. Justice is integral. If you have love, then justice is bound to be there. Without justice there can be no peace, without justice there can be no love, no compassion. So we have to be very clear. Justice, Justice and Justice unlimited. That should be our goal.

Possibility of students working in your





movement and contributing and learning from it.

Thank you very much, thank you. This is what I wanted to hear. It is music to my ears that you have asked the question which I look forward to. See I'm looking forward to a global community you know? Community, when we say community we always mean a small small village or forest community. No. It's a global community. If we can broadly agree on this paradigm, then we can become a nucleus. The world needs a new nucleus. From the materialistic paradigm, consumeristic paradigm, and the power of the corporates and the other paradigm, we need a humane paradigm, a spiritual paradigm. If most of us or some of us can agree that "Yes this is what we should be working towards" then it can be the starting of the Vasudaiva Kutumbikam. This is the movement I want to launch from 1st of January 2015. It just so happened that I happen to be here in Hyderabad. And Venkat, he was very kind, he chose me to. . he brought me from Delhi this morning, asked me to launch or sort of inaugurate. So we all lit this little lamp to begin with. What does it mean? There is enveloping darkness; there is so much of cynicism. Individual citizens are feeling helpless. And hopeless. And hapless. In this moment of darkness all around, they say that instead of cursing the darkness, let's light a candle. That's precisely what we did to begin with. We lit a candle. And every human heart has a spark. Every human heart. If only we can properly enkindle it, with compassion we can globalize love, we can globalize justice and we can globalize truth. And truth means what? Speaking truth to power. There was a great communist leader in South Africa and my email always carries this quotation at the bottom, with my address and date: Speaking truth to power, . . . it was Jeremy Cronin—South African leader, a communist leader who said "Most important thing is to speak truth to power and to make powerful truthful and thereby, truth, powerful". That's it, that's the spirit. So if we can all join hands, that's all I want. No need for money

or charity or contribution. Let's join hands as equal partners. Don't call me a great Swamiji or I'm not a preacher, I'm like you, one of you. So if we can all join hands on the basis of being partners increasing this new hope, this new human family where the least among the last. Gandhiji had this idea. He himself was empowered by European philosophers but when he planted this here on this land, a "Anthyodaya" that means. . . and this was the idea he gave to our first prime minister interestingly. When I was in jail for 13, 14 months during Emergency, I was incarcerated because of my activism because of my social activism. I was too much for the powers that be so they put me in jail. They put me in jail 11 times for many of my protests and fights. There have been 6 attempts on my life. I am still surviving, going strong, running 76 years and now completed 75 years so no regrets. What I'm saying is that when I was in jail, I read about Gandhiji's charisma, that is his one sentence sage advice which he gave to the first Prime minister of India, Jawaharlal Nehru. He summoned him and told him alone, that "Look Nehru, as Prime Minister of this great nation you will have difficult moments to make decisions to choose from this policy or that policy. At a moment of confusion" he said "My simple advice is, you will close the door of your office and you will close your own eye and imagine the face of the poorest of the poor you have ever come across. Poorest of the poor; the most hapless, hopeless person you have come across in your life. If you imagine the face of that poor person and ask yourself a simple question: whether this decision, this policy is going to empower that least among the last first to begin with; bottom upwards. And if your heart and mind tells you, "Yes, Yes, Yes", then implement that policy with full fury. But if you have doubts that it will start from the poorest upwards, it will make the rich, richer, it will make the powerful more powerful, and in course of time five, ten, fifty years it will trickle down, it will percolate, then don't trust this theory of development" he said. That's the simple sentence. It is engraved on stone when you go to Delhi. There is a place where Gandhi has been cremated. It is called Raj Ghat and it is a ritual for all heads of state when they come, they visit that place, they put flowers on his Samadhi, but they don't read that sentence. It is engraved one side in Hindi and another side in English. It says, "this is my life's whole teaching". One sentence he says, the poorest of the poor should be the one to begin with and that person should be the yard stick to measure your development every year, every five years. If development has taken place there first, and then



gone upwards it is right. If it is the other way round—bottom and then trickling down, percolating down, then reject it. Unfortunately globalization is all about, globalization is all about, market forces are all about percolation, about trickle-down theory. So Gandhi has been given up in his own land. You can become new Gandhis. All of you and you can create a new hope. Thank you.

How does the Economic Market place look as per the new paradigm ?

As I said, earlier, sharing and caring so that others can simply live. More than a billion people are going hungry. On the other side 40000 children are dying everyday. And we have a flourishing meat industry in the world. The UN report on Climate Change. The UN report prepared by Al Gore and our own Nobel Laureate, Dr. Pachauri. It says. . . that report is named Long Shadow of Live stock industry remain the main main culprit of the climate change crisis. Live stock industry, animal farm industry. 1 billion birds, animal being killed every day. Now this is a challenge. Can we address this our life style? What we should we eat? What we should drink? To start with. Be the change you want to see in the world. That's what Gandhi said. So you start with yourself, what you eat, and then you can ask other people. Persuade them and in this way we create whole of humanity where we don't have to kill any bird or animal to satiate our taste buds. Yes? That's one simple way. Similarly, don't consume much. When I told the World Bank President



he invited me to Canterbury, the Archbishop of Canterbury. The then Archbishop of Canterbury George Carey, and the president of World Bank formed one beautiful body called World Faith Development Dialogue and Catherine Marshall from Washington University, she was there to coordinate. So, there I questioned and I said, this alcohol industry, arms industry; billions and billions are being spent on armament, in the name of defense. While poor are dying of hunger, countries and nations and big powerful people are spending billions on arms. Billions. Why? Can't we stop it? One week, one week's arms spending can bring education to all the children on this planet earth. One week. Cut down one week expenditure on armaments and then you have got enough. You can provide clean drinking water all over the world. You can mitigate hunger and suffering and medical, everything if you can just cut down one month's armament expenditure. So there is enough resources. But nobody is questioning that. Sometimes when we question, "Oh why are you saying all this? You should be saying goody goody things" people tell me. My good friends tell me, "Swamiji you always tell something nasty and so, then you will not be popular" I said "Well, what can I do? Better be not popular, but I must speak the truth." Speaking the truth is something which I like and which. . . I don't go to any temple to worship, speaking truth is my worship. So if you analyze all of this system on which all of the present day economics is built, you will find one after the other, the big big ones are all unnecessary, they are polluting, they are taking away the rights and dignity of millions and millions of the people, they are denuding the forests, everything you will find the answers there. Yes? So, but we need to do our research, present papers and demolish these structures. Structural violence is there and until and unless you identify each one of these structures which are very very big and growing bigger every day, that can be your contribution you are in a position where from you can academically, intellectually demolish these so called structures. And that will empower the poor. More than giving them any money or bread or clothes, give them this hope that we can overcome. We shall overcome one day. Yes? Thank you.

(Transcription of Inaugural Address delivered by Swami Agniveshi on December 14th, 2014 at the 'International Conference on Community Empowerment : Coping, Resilience and Hope' jointly organised by Centre for Action Research and People's Development Based Practice Inc at Marigold by Greenpark, Hyderabad, India, December 14th to 16th 2014)

ARDY HULSBERGEN

Namaste,

Dear Swamiji, or also: dear Agni, this is how I often addressed Swami Agniveshin a letter or app, expressing both, my admiration and respect for him as aspiritual leader of great wisdom and dedication to the cause of the poorest, but at the same time as the very dear and close friend since 25 years.

He allowed me to contribute with my small foundation, the AGNI Foundation, to his large projects, to improve the lives of the poorest, children and their parents, looking at us with big desperate eyes. We touched them, the untouchables, we embraced them, showed them compassion and respect for their perseverance to make a living, helped the parents to educate their children. Our main goal was to change the deprivation of these tribal people, to help them to overcome their sense of being worthless by teaching them self confidence and dignity, by education, our material and moral support and our attitude of respect. With BMF our foundation worked on there habilitation of liberated slaves, founding a school and a Health Centre, this last now being managed by BMF. We visited the projects, either with Swamiji, or with a staff member. With Swamiji we went to check the reconstruction of a village destroyed by the earthquake in 2001. Once we participated in a march. Whatever we did with him, we always had long discussions about spiritual issues, social injustice, our work for the poor.

Swamiji, in his saffron activist's clothes, "signalling color", as he called it, was organizing and leading demonstrations, marches, protests, waving his fists, shouting at huge crowds, working day and night for his cause, being at the same time, just as much, the compassionate, loving, tender man, who fought against injustice, because he suffered with the oppressed and the abused. Once we were having dinner in Shivpuri with him and Swami Arjyavesh, when the news came about the shooting at farmers who defended their land, their lives. He was terribly shocked and sad, suffering and unable to conceal his distress. Becoming furious and planning action helped him in such situations to cope with his emotions. He was vulnerable too, could be hurt if he felt that someone betrayed him, but very happy with affection and support by a friend. Whenever we stayed in his apartment, we saw another side of him: witty, charming, open and honest, the perfect host, who organized tea with a neighbour when he was late for our appointment.

Beyond doubt he will be remembered as the social activist/priest, the Holy Man, who sacrificed a personal life and career to his struggle for the poor, the deprived. His important awards, the Swiss Freedom and Human Rights Award in 1984, the Right Livelihood Award in 2004 and recently the last: the Hero of Humanity Award, are fully deserved.

Dear Agni, just before you passed away I sent you a quote (not knowing that you would be too sick to read it) from a French song, saying that the things that are the most important between people are not being said, because there are no words to express the core of them, the emotion. How true...

It was a privilege to me to have known you, you gave us so much to be grateful for. Thank you so much for everything, I will always remember you, our long talks, our lunches at Jantar Mantar, our meetings in Stuttgart and Vienna, your stay in Hengelo. Thank you, thank you.

(Ardy Hulsbergen-Slijter, Preident of the AGNI Foundation Jan Hulsbergen, M.D., treasurer and medical advisor Quirine Langeveld, secretary, Margreet van der Meer, member 21-9-2020)

OLIVER MENDELSON La Trobe University, Melbourne, Australia

I have been a friend of Swamiji for almost 40 years. I still remember the first time I saw him, at 7- Jantar Mantar Road. New Delhi He radiated goodwill and intensity in a way I have almost never experienced in my life. And he never lost this quality.

What made me keen to meet Swamiji was his commitment to those toiling at the bottom of India's social and industrial hierarchy—the bonded migrant labourers working in stone quarries, brick kilns and other sites of hard and dangerous work across India. I met him as an academic writing a book about these people. More than any one else, he made the dreadful situation of these people politically and legally visible. It was one of the great privileges of my life to go with Swamiji to the Faridabad and other quarries on a number of occasions.

Some years later Swamiji came to a conference we organised in Melbourne. On yet another visit to Melbourne he stayed at our house and even spoke to my daughter's classroom at her school. She reported that Swamiji began his talk by asking the Australian teenagers to join him in a Yogic breathing exercise. From that moment he had the whole class eating out of his hand. He always had a great capacity to transcend nations and cultures. The last substantial conversation I had with Swamiji late last year he talked to me about his organisation to promote world peace. Swamiji never lacked for ambition! In someone else this might have appeared simply native, but from him, the goal of world peace looked not only appropriate but even possible.

We desperately need people like Swami Agnivesh. But in reality, there is only one of him. I will miss him deeply as a friend and as someone who matters to the World.

Oliver Mendelsohn La Trobe University, Melbourne, Australia

Post-COVID,

religion must be God-centred and priest-free

Worship must be to spiritual life what breathing is to physical life. Just as there are no middle men in our breathing—except the deadly middle man of pollution—in the spiritual breathing of worship too, there must be no middle men.

Written by Swami Agnivesh, Valsan Thampu

Misusing faith, religious establishments and the priestly class distorted religious culture and made the life of religious communities centred not on God, but places of worship.

We are living, said Pope Francis, not so much in an era of change as in a change of era. The COVID-19 pandemic is a water shed moment in history. The present disarray, destruction and suffering are the birthing pangs of a new era. We hear the foot falls of the departing gods fading behind us, even if we don't see the foot prints of the incoming gods in front of us.

The brunt of this transition falls on religions because they thrive on the past. All religions claim to be inheritors of exclusive spiritual legacies, which they treat as closed systems. They hold zealously to the letter and litter of it, even though the world around them has changed beyond recognition. As a result, religions remain enclaves of regression in an ever-changing World.

This results from the supremacy that religions attach to "faith". Faith is pitted against reason. Surely, this cannot be faith in God; for God is Supreme Reason. It is faith in the religious establishment and its agendas. This specious faith is used to suppress in human beings the divine attributes of love, truth, justice and compassion. This goes against the grain of scriptures. For that reason, the light of scriptures is kept hidden from believers. Historically, it was the priestly class that exalted faith above the attributes of God. This had the effect of the dethroning of God.

Opinion | Resetting civilisation in post-Covid-19 world

Misusing faith, religious establishments and the priestly class distorted religious culture and made the life of religious communities centred not on God, but places of worship. To hide the irrationality this entailed, they distorted the idea of God. Consequently, the omni present God became a local deity who stays tamely confined within the narrow radius of priestly interests and sleights of hand. God was turned into an alibi for fragmenting human kind, and an excuse for spreading communal poison. God of love became God of hate. God of truth became God of untruth. God of light became God of darkness. It looks as though the COVID pandemic has come

to emancipate us from this sub human religiosity. The virus has freed us from our addiction to priestly potions in temples, churches, and mosques. The fact that the rupture in people's addiction to places of worship is enabling many to recognise the super fluity of priest-manipulated, temple-centred religiosity, is troubling the priestly class as a whole. It is now fairly clear that religiosity of this kind was not for the sake of the people, but people were being used for the profit of religious establishments.

Unlike love, which is universal, faith is inherently parochial. Faith is exclusive to religious groups. Zeal for one's faith breeds hate and hostility to the faiths of others. It is this naiveté that custodians of religions breed and exploit to deadly effect.

The priestly class can be trusted to import their agenda into the post-COVID era. It is in the interest of humanity that they be not allowed to do this. A new age needs a new spiritual vision. That vision has to be informed by the godly attributes of love, truth, justice and compassion. The priestly class has no use for these values. They are incompatible with priestly interests. The new World cannot live on their regressive menu from the past. It is spirituality, not religion, that human kind in the new world needs.

Opinion | Social distancing is antithetical to festivals, but it is the only way The virus has undermined every aspect of priest-driven religiosity. Temples, mosques and churches are closed. Most people do not miss them ! The tinkling of coins is no longer heard in sanctuaries, and that does not seem to upset gods. The communal nexus between religion and politics stands paralysed. Post-COVID, religion must be God-centred and priest-free, unburdened with places of worship. Worship, free from rituals, dogmas, deception and priestly hypocrisy, must nourish life. Worship must be to spiritual life what breathing is to physical life. Just as there are no middle men in our breathing—except the deadly middle man of pollution—in the spiritual breathing of worship too, there must be no middle men.

The emphasis must shift from salvation to social justice, from piety to peace, from rituals to human development, from divisive faith to universal love. Humanity must be free at last to recognise the God of justice who has no favourites or special agents.

This article first appeared in the print edition on June 30, 2020 under the title "Emancipated By Virus". Agnivesh is a Vedic scholar and social activist and Thampu was principal of St. Stephen's College, Delhi.

Tribute

Agnivesh (1939-2020) :

The man who tried to reclaim the colour saffron from political opportunists

He devoted his life to India's most marginalised and to the cause of secularism -John Dayal

Vepa Shyam Rao died ten days short of a precise 81 years in the Intensive Care Unit of a Delhi hospital, of the long-term impact of injuries sustained two years ago when the lone unarmed man was surrounded and beaten by armed assailants in Jharkhand. A lynch mob, you could call them.

Even for people who did not read newspapers or did not watch television, it was not difficult to spot Agnivesh, the name that Rao later assumed. If anyone had seen a calendar painting of Swami Vivekananda, they would recognise Agnivesh, by colour, clothes and stance.

As Swami Agnivesh, the global chief of the break away denomination of the Arya Samaj, the man from Srikakulam in Andhra Pradesh fought for more than half a century to reclaim the sanctity and honour of the bhagwa, or ochre-saffron of the ascetic, from charlatans and political opportunists who had used its successfully to propel religious nationalism to power in India. Those were his words to me.

He challenged them on their turf, and defeated them more often than not. They learnt not to confront him face to face, even if they continued to occasionally nip at his heels, or, in later days, troll him in paid packs.

Learned and conscientious

Perhaps it will be said that Agnivesh, in the end, lost what he had set out to achieve as a young management graduate, who later collected degrees in law and commerce, taught in Jesuit institutions, and one day, sort of, gave it up to become a human rights activist and the Hindu version of a Jesuit-learned, conscientious and singular in pursuit.

That is the Swami I encountered early in my reporting days, and grew up with as a friend, occasional colleague and often comrade in activism against communalism and the erosion of civil liberties.

We shared hundreds of platforms in India and in the West, arguing why it was so important not just for us as Indian citizens, but for the world and its peace, that our home land remained secular, democratic, a respecter of human rights, and if possible, an example to the world.

He was absolutely the darling of the international media, world leaders and fellow activists, striding the public platform as a colossus in his ochrekurta-dhoti, and the trade mark turban of the same flaming hue adding even more stature to his tall and strong frame.

Little wonder that he could hold his own in Haryana where, for a short while, he fought and won an election

to the state assembly and was made a minister. Not for long, but it did give him an insight into the way politics is played in India.

It was in Haryana he discovered a modern form of slavery—the phenomenon of bonded labour. A marginal farmer or a landless laborer would borrow money, sign a paper, and then discover that just to pay off the interest, he and his wife would have to serve the lender for the rest of their life. And then the children would inherit the debt, and the bondage.

Agnivesh devoted his life to eradicate this menace. He would expose it in India in meetings and seminars, leading his band of followers to rescue bonded labour from brick kilns in villages and outside towns. It could become a street fight.

Fighting India's inequities

Agnivesh once led a band of a few score ragged children and adults to raid the Ashoka Hotel, crying out how could seven-star edifices co-exist with people who had no present, and no future. The police and the governments were not amused.

But Agnivesh made the world conscious of this and many other inequities that still be set India—including the inequities of caste, and the worst manifestation of caste, manual scavenging.

We have together been a part of movements against this. And once in the birth place of Bhim Rao Ambedkar, in Mhow, Madhya Pradesh, both of us had the privilege of washing the feet of manual scavengers. Among them was a woman who had vowed to give it up and get everyone else to also do so. Her daughter was astudent of law. Agnivesh was in tears. He was not the only one.

At home as much on the street and in demonstrations at one or another of the many offices in Delhi or elsewhere, Agnivesh was in full flow on the global stage. We were at the World Parliament of Religions where once, in Chicago, Swami Vivekanand had spoken of the greatness Hinduism. Agnivesh mounted the stage and cautioned the world what would become of Vivekananda's words if the communalism gnawed away at the very super structure of Indian democracy. The many thousands gathered rose in acclamation. Days later, I spoke at the valedictory on the underbelly of South Asia.

As Agnivesh recovered from being attacked in Jharkhand in 2018, he met with Delhi Arch bishop Anil

Couto, activist John Dayal and Father Felix of the Catholi carchdiocese commission for inter faith dialogue. Credit: John Dayal via Facebook

International wards and honorary positions sat easy on his frame. He had been the international chair of one of the United Nation's committees on Modern Forms of Slavery.

The Swami had his quirks, if I may so call them. A celibate, teetotaler, a vegetarian, he followed an Arya Samaj that did not believe in idols and idol worship, or things others of his faith held sacred. He surprised many audiences greeting them in Urdu and a few words of Arabic he had picked up in his globe-trotting.

He often said, repeating the words of Mahatma Gandhi, that he loved Jesus, but perhaps not some of those who claimed to follow him. He was a verse to evangelisation, and opposed conversions. He stuck to his point of view even if one told him opposing conversions—not just to Christianity—also meant that one did not accept that the poor, dispossessed and the so called outcastes had agency in matters of faith, but were doomed to die in bondage both to religion and to caste.

A charismatic, brave man

I salute one of the most charismatic and bravest men I've ever met.

Who else, clad in the dress once worn by Swami Vivekanand, could argue with and answer back everyone from a Shankaracharya down to the knife-wielding thug who said he was protecting India?

Of course they attacked him, more than once, grievously injuring him sometimes. But they got a taste of his whiplash tongue that they would remember.

He once whiplashed the Israeli border guards at the Jordan crossing when they refused us—a small delegation invited by the Palestinian sand with proper visas from both Jordan and Israel—ermission to enter Israel. The Israeli guards had confiscated our passports and would not return them. The Swami sat on a dharna, screaming at the officials, giving a speech to the motley gathering of refugees, visitors, Israeli nationals and Palestinians crowded in the hall.

The officers did not know what hit them. Interpreters were called, officials and diplomats were mobilised, and we were out on a bus back to Jordan, and back home.

That was my last trip outside India with Agnivesh.

Now, the Covid-19 pandemic has prevented us from paying personal homage to a friend, and a crusader.

-John Dayal is a journalist and human rights activist

MY TRIBUTE TO SWAMI AGNIVESH JI

-Sanjiv Varma

Gautam Buddha once said, "There have been many Buddhas before me and will be many Buddhas in the future. "All living beings have the Buddha nature and can become Buddhas."

These words came to my mind when the news of demise of Swami Agnivesh ji was announced. Enlightened people never die. It will be wrong to use word RIP ("Rest in Peace") for him. I would never use that word for him. I would rather say, "Please Come back Soon." He never rested in his life. I am sure that he will be back soon in a new form to finish unfinished work of his life. He is not a kind of person, who would like to rest in peace. He was true to his name "Agni" or "Fire"—he came to burn the impurities of our society—he fought for justice—he never compromised with his values. I am sure that he will continue this mission in his next innings too.

According to Vedas, the aim of human life is "Manur bhava": i.e. become a human in "True" sense. One must rise above false identities that one gets with birth: Indian, Pakistani, American, Hindu, Muslim, Brahmin, Kshatriya etc. We become slave of these false identities for the brief period that we sojourn in the "physical" self. This is what Swamiji tried to convey through his writings and speeches. I noticed that Swamiji's critics are slave of their "false" identities and ego associated with those identities. One must unshackle oneself from these assumed identities to understand his message.

Learned people say, "Humans are spiritual beings having human experiences." If we could look back at our spiritual journey using a large time scale of thousands or millions of years then we would realize that we had taken.

Several "false" identities in this journey—a "Hindu" of present life could be a "Muslim" in his/her previous sojourn on this mother earth. An enlightened person or "Buddha" raises himself/herself above these false identities. Swami Agnivesh ji was "Buddha" of our times.

Lastly, I have a message for friends of Swamiji. Please do not make a statue in his name or write a bhajan in his praise. If you are his true friend then take his message of Truth, Love, Compassion and Justice to every nook and corner of the world. That will be a true Tribute to this great soul.

Not All Orange is Equal

A tribute to Swami Agnivesh ji from Swami Ambikananda Saraswati



I first encountered Swami Agnivesh through the television. By chance one evening while at home in the UK, I found myself watching a programme about a Hindu swami working with bonded labourers in India. At the time Swamiji was Chairman of the UN Committee against Modern Forms of Slavery and he spoke eloquently about global slavery and its particular form in India as bonded labour.

A frequent traveller to India at the time, I decided to try and meet him on my next trip. A fellow monastic in an ashram at the Himalayan foot hills, Swami Narasimhulu ji, tracked him down for me and found me a contact number. I always stopped in Delhi for a few days on my way north, so the next time my feet touched the blessed soil of India, I phoned the number. To my surprise Swami Agnivesh himself answered and immediately invited me to the offices of Bandhua Mukti Morcha The Bonded Labour Liberation Movement.

I was intrigued and looked forward to my first meeting with him. He did not disappoint. Unlike many men in orange he had not adopted the role of the 'holy man'. I had encountered many of them: men who have morphed their weighty egos into 'contemplative' masks always smiling gently, always talking in solemn tones to those whom they consider to be so much

less than they. Right from the start, Swami Agnivesh ji greeted me with respect as a human being and as an equal.

He explained the work they were doing, its multi-faceted requirements: from running schools on the sites of bonded labour (usually building works on the outskirts of major cities like New Delhi) for the children of the bonded "labourers who would otherwise have been excluded from education, to talking to and organising the bonded labourers themselves. Bonded labour is illegal in India and Swamiji's major work was to help those trapped in it often for generations to use the law to free themselves. Over the next few years I got to know both Swamiji and his work as, together with a few friends, we began fund-raising for him in the UK. My encounters with him always left me feeling that justice and freedom are a part of dharma that are not simply to be talked about as abstract ideas, but turned into a reality for all; that working towards social justice is as sacred a work as working on one's own spiritual liberation (moksha). That, he always made clear, is the spiritual path: you have to live, to put into practice your own spiritual transformation in this world of inequalities and injustices. I can still hear his clear tones, laughingly but also seriously intoning, "You're either a missionary



or a mercenary in this world. Your choice.”

As with my own guru, Swami Venkatesanandaji (a disciple of the venerated Swami Sivananda), Swami Agnivesh never in all the years I worked with him showed any kind of prejudice against women or people born into lesser circumstances in life. This might seem the minimum requirement for a man of the cloth, but sadly I had encountered both male and social prejudice in too many of the men in orange, to take it for granted.

I watched Swamiji as he spoke to and worked with the poorest and most wretched men and women and always there was that same respect and ease: all were his equal and he had a wonderful knack of making people feel, as he worked tirelessly on their behalf, that he was working with friends, in friendship. Everyone left his company feeling elevated. Swamiji understood clearly the devastation that can be caused to religious communities by missionary work and conversion. However, he dealt with it in “a manner that kept dialogue open. I recall one occasion where Christian missionaries working in a part of India were reportedly paying people to convert. A newspaper phoned Swamiji and asked him to comment. Swamiji knew only too well the awful conditions of poverty that these people had to live under, and so responded to the reporter on the phone, “If they’re doing it for money, I advise them to do it three times a day.” It was a damning dismissal of this kind of missionary work without elevating it to a crisis that would create a conflict that would jeop-
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 Arya Jeevan

The real enemy is poverty and Swamiji always clearly understood that. That is not to say that Swami Agnivesh was devoted to entirely secular values. On the contrary, his spiritual life was lived in the same vigorous manner as his life in the world. The esteem and love of Swami Dayananda the fire-brand founder of Arya Samaj was clear whenever he spoke of him, which was often. Indeed, the ground of his path in this world was aspiritual path. What makes him different is that he has actually lived it, rather than simply talking about it.

For Swami Agnivesh, his own subjective experience of the Divine never got isolated and elevated to an idol of worship. And this is what has made him stand out; that is what has made his orange robe truly become the fire rather than the dressing: his commitment to the belief that the experience of our divinity lived and practised in the movement for social justice is open to all, and that in the seeking of it we are all equal.

Hari OM Tat Sat !



Swami Agnivesh: Activist in saffron

(Print Edition : 9th October, 2020)

- T.K. Rajalakshmi

Swami Agnivesh (1939-2020), a voice of reason amid the shrillness of religious bigotry, worked tirelessly to eradicate social evils and uphold constitutional values.

He was the kind of seer who did not sound like one. There was little of the “swami” in him. His saffron habit, with the trademark turban, appeared patterned on Swami Vivekananda. He was the original man in saffron robes, much before it was politically appropriated by aggressive Hindu cultural nationalists. In the media he was mainly identified as the man who worked to rescue bonded labourers in north India, mainly Punjab and Haryana. But Swami Agnivesh, who passed away on 11th September in a New Delhi hospital following a liver-related illness, was more than that. He was a social activist, academician, politician, reformer and Arya Samaj proponent.

Originally from Andhra Pradesh, he was born Vepa Shyam Rao into an upper-caste family. He was educated in Calcutta (now Kolkata). He obtained degrees in law and management but gave up the pursuit of a career. He emerged as an Arya Samaj leader and used his background to work for an end to bonded labour, then widely prevalent in parts of north India. He founded the Bandhua Mukti Morcha (Bonded Labour Liberation Front) in the early 1980s. In 1994, he was made the chairperson of the United Nations Trust Fund on Contemporary Forms of Slavery.

Role in social campaigns



Born a Hindu, Swami Agnivesh was primarily a reformer with liberal values and was deeply bothered about the politicisation of Hinduism. His concerns ranged from the eradication of bonded labour to gender equity. He did not mind if people chose to address him



Swami Agnivesh, a 2013 picture. Photo: Rohit Jain Paras

5th December, 1987: Swami Agnivesh leading sadhus and Arya Samaj activists against sati on a padda yatra from Delhi to Deorala. Photo: THE HINDU ARCHIVES

without the prefix of “swami”, which was a reason why he was not viewed as a person with rigid ideas. He worked alongside many groups involved in civil liberties across India and had little difficulty identifying himself with their causes.

He campaigned against female foeticide, alcoholism and violence against Dalits, tribal people and women. He was against obscurantism, ritual-driven religion, superstition and the caste system. The bonded labourers he rescued were invariably from landless Dalit communities, and the people he took up the cudgels against were politically influential upper-caste agriculturists. Swami Agnivesh identified himself with campaigns for social, economic and political justice. He spoke out against caste panchayats and exhorted the Arya Samaj to take on the self-styled custodians of society. He was seen on anti-imperialist and anti-globalisation platforms too. Since he deplored communalism and casteism equally, his presence on podiums along with leaders of secular and democratic parties was a given. In 2010, the then Central government entrusted him with the task of brokering peace talks with the Maoists.

It was not for no reason that his demise was condoled across the progressive political spectrum. Congress president Sonia Gandhi and vice president Rahul Gandhi, Communist Party of India (Marxist) general secretary Sitaram Yechury, Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) general secretary Dipankar Bhattacharya, and the Chief Ministers of Andhra Pradesh, Telangana and Rajasthan sent condolence messages. Actors Swara Bhasker and Divya Dutta and former Rajya Sabha member and poet Javed Akhtar also tweeted their condolences.

A right-wing news portal remarked caustically that it was only the “liberals” who had expressed their condolences while other political parties remained silent or indifferent. This indifference was most noticeable when, a day after his death, a former Central Bureau of Investigation chief described his death as “good riddance” and abused him with casteist slurs on social media, but there was hardly any condemnation from his political patrons.

Thorn for the Right

Swami Agnivesh took political positions that were deeply uncomfortable to the political Right. He viewed the Ram Jannabhooni movement itself as a political ploy. Writing in *The Indian Express* on 12th February, 2018, he said that there was not a shred of evidence for the claims made by the Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh (RSS) and the Vishwa Hindu Parishad on the disputed site. He blamed the Congress for its appease–ment politics and stated that the then government had lost an opportunity to resolve the issue.

His main concern, he wrote, was that the people were being “perversely misled and their credulity was exploited for political gains by those who do not care

a pin for the spiritual greatness of the Vedic faith. As an ardent devotee of this spiritual heritage, I feel cheated and violated.” He called the movement a “dance of aggression” that “mocks God”. He said that what hurt him most was the “utter irrationality of the communal agenda”.

In 1987, he took out a march against the practice of sati from New Delhi to Deorala in Rajasthan with 101 sanyasis. The march was in protest against the burning of a woman named Roop Kanwar on the funeral pyre of her husband in September that year, and against other social evils such as child marriage, dowry and the persecution of widows. He told media persons that he had received threats from those who glorified sati. He took on the Dharma Raksha Samiti, a pro-sati group, on this issue. He was finally arrested for violating prohibitory orders.

In 1970, Swami Agnivesh formed the Arya Sabha, a political front, along with others. In 1977, he was elected to the Haryana Assembly. He joined the Janata Party and served as Education Minister but quit after two years to protest against the government’s inaction on the issue of police firing on a march against bonded labour. He became a popular figure among the socially and economically oppressed. Later, he supported anti-corruption movements and backed Anna Hazare and his movement in New Delhi.

He went to Gujarat with Valsan Thampu, former principal of Delhi’s St. Stephens College, after the riots of 2002, where they visited the camps and wrote about the unprecedented “cruelty”. A peace march that he had planned along with others could not be held. In a co-authored article on his website, reminiscing about the situation there, he wrote that Gujarat might not have happened but for the United States-led antipathy towards Muslims where the war on terror had made “Muslim-bashing a popular sport” just like “bear-baiting in Elizebathean England” or “Christian baiting in Nero’s Rome”.

In a previous article, reflecting on the murder of the Australian missionary Graham Staines and his two children in Baripada, Odisha, and after meeting Staines’ wife, Gladys Staines, he wondered what was the worth of religion if “it was not to nurture us in a sense of compassion and fellow feeling that denies us peace unless we practice justice and uphold the truth”. He took out a “multi-religious” pilgrimage to Manoharpur where the incident had occurred.

In one article, he regretted that the Arya Samaj had done little for the empowerment of Dalits. He remarked that it was an “astonishing reality that despite the ardent and admirable work” of reformers such as Kabir, Guru Nanak, the Buddha, Mahavira, Dayanand Saraswati, Mahatma Gandhi and Dr. Ambedkar, “no dent could be made in the oppressive caste system”.

According to him, vote-bank politics had increased the power of the caste system. He did not see

“conversions” as a way out since discrimination was not uncommon even in the religions Dalits converted to. The Arya Samaj too had failed. Its agenda for “liberation had been diluted by a spirit of compromise and accommodation with the caste agenda”, he wrote. Caste interests had infiltrated and hijacked the movement, and Dalits could not distinguish between the Arya Samaj and upper-caste practices, he said. He believed that since “Hindus had invented the caste system”, they ought to be the first to dismantle and disown it.

He believed that the Arya Samaj was an option for Dalits in terms of their social and religious rehabilitation, but said that it had to reform itself from its current state. His solutions for getting rid of caste-based oppression seemed simplistic, as if it was a case of offering a “humane” social order for Dalits within the fold of the Arya Samaj where Arya stood for “nobleness”. His views did not go down well with caste Hindus.

Swami Agnivesh was also openly critical of the various “babas” and “gurus” and their commercial ventures. He came out publicly against a very famous yoga guru in one of his columns in a leading English daily. He wrote that “Hinduism was truly in peril”. According to him, the “cocktail of politics, corporatisation and communalism under the name and colour of Hinduism today threatens its authenticity”. He was also openly critical of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and its role in the rise of communalism in the country.

Inderjit Singh, vice president of the Haryana unit of the Kisan Sabha, said that Swami Agnivesh was critical of the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA) and was supportive of the protests against it. “It is a loss in a political sense as well. At a personal level too, many of us have felt a deep sense of loss. We disagreed with him on issues, but he was never strident in his disagreement with us,” he said. Despite being a proponent of the Arya Samaj, his approach was different from that of other proponents of the order. There was potential for the growth of progressive elements within the Arya Samaj in Haryana. But that progressive streak did not continue for long. There was criticism that the Arya Samaj had become very “muth-oriented”.

Inderjit Singh said that Swami Agnivesh, who was jailed during the Emergency for 19 months, identified himself with the progressive liberal sections, many of whom ascribed to leftist ideology. “The RSS and its affiliates were always irritated with him as he openly criticised their version of Hinduism,” said Inderjit Singh.

In August 2018, when he went to pay his respects to former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee at the BJP office in New Delhi, he was attacked by BJP workers who tore his turban and punched him as the police looked on. A month earlier, he had been physically attacked in Pakur, Jharkhand, by Bharatiya Janata Yuva Morcha workers for supporting “cow

slaughter”. Swami Agnivesh had spoken out against lynchings in the name of cow protection and blamed the BJP leadership for the polarisation.

His views on majority communalism were well known although he spoke out more frequently and sharply after the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government was formed in 2014 and incidents of vigilante mob justice were on the rise. He was openly critical of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the RSS. In a 2018 seminar organised by the Rajiv Gandhi Institute of Development Studies, he likened Modi to Adolf Hitler, who he said had also got elected democratically.

“I have opposed the RSS agenda of imposing Hindu Rashtira on India because it forebodes a vulgarisation of our spiritual heritage. This bigotry is an aberration. It breeds violence and intolerance. We should never degenerate into a theological state and regress to the pre-modern misery of religious obscurantism and communal bigotry,” he wrote in a press statement in response to RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat’s statement that “all Indians were Hindus”.

Jagmati Sangwan, former general secretary of the All India Democratic Women’s Association (AIDWA), said that his passing away was a great loss as he represented a radical revolutionary stream of the Arya Samaj which openly challenged the caste system.

“He had a special relationship with Haryana. It was unfortunate that he was attacked by communal elements despite being advanced in age. One hopes that at least now they would express regret after his demise,” she said.

In a statement, the All India Democratic Women’s Association AIDWA described him as a “strong supporter of women’s rights” who participated in campaigns against sex-selective abortions, sati, dowry deaths and the plight of child widows.

Swami Agnivesh was a voice of reason amid the shrillness of religious bigotry. Among the current breed of seers and sadhus, he stood out in his saffron robes as one clearly in favour of social, religious and economic reform in the democratic secular framework of the Constitution.



*With Planning commission chairman
Sri Montek Singh Ahluwalia*

TODAY THE 21st SEPTEMBER IS THE BIRTHDAY OF **SWAMI AGNIVESH**

(1939-2020)

- WORLD PEACE DAY



On birth day occasion Swami ji with the then Vice President of India Janab Mohammad Ansari ji, Sri Sushel Goswami ji, Swami Chidanand . Moulana Wahiduddin Khan Islamic Scholar

Swami Agnivesh was a Revolutionary Saint Born on 21st September, 1939 in Varanasi, winner of the Alternative Nobel Peace Prize (the Right Livelihood Award), 2004, is a cyclonic Swami. At the young age of 28, he abandoned a promising career as a professor of law and management in Calcutta for a life of activism. Born into a Brahmin-upper caste-South Indian family, he shed his name, caste, religion, family, and all his belongings and property to adopt the life of a 'Swami' or renunciate, and began his life's crusade for social justice and compassion. The term 'Swami' is misused and misunderstood. It denotes, as with Christian or Buddhist monks and renunciates, one who gives up all his individual, social and birth based identities and belongings to serve humanity and pursue spiritual truth.

About Eighty one year old Swami Agnivesh was the most distinguished leader of the Arya Samaj. In 1994, he was appointed the Chairperson of the UN Trust Fund on Contemporary Forms of Slavery. He is better known across the globe in general and India in particular for his campaigns against bonded labor, and is founder Chairperson of the Bandhua Mukti Morcha (Bonded Labor Liberation Front). He also worked as

the President of the World Council of Arya Samaj (Sarvadeshik Arya Pratinidhi Sabha) during the year 2004-2016.

Whether it was Gandhi, Dayanand, Ambedkar all worked for the betterment of the society and the people with a few differences in their methods and ideals. They all styled themselves in particular ways. Swami Agnivesh too had his own style but with clear reasons and commitments. He was clad in saffron from top to bottom. However, we often find Swami say that the saffron, 'is my uniform for socio-spiritual action, a call to battle on behalf of the oppressed.' Saffron is the color of sacrifice, commitment and purity and he believes it helps him in his work of love, truth, compassion and justice. However he also makes it absolutely clear and says with utmost realism and practicality that, "If my clothes come in the way of this, I won't mind renouncing them. It matters little if you call me "Swami Agnivesh or simply "Agnivesh". All that matters is the fire inside me, the presence of the divine in the inner temple of my being, should continue to blaze till the end."

Swami Agnivesh was a man of action. He preached but preached only what he practices. His words catch

fire in the heat of his involvement imprinted with the zeal of compassion. He has given proof of being an outstanding leader and has inspired many young minds to strive towards making this world better place to live in. His dedication to work with the oppressed and passion for social justice are as old as his political career which goes back many years to his entry into the Haryana Assembly in 1977. His activism, appearance and understanding leaves a lot of us astonished and at the same time provokes us to strive hard for social amelioration while generating love and respect among the masses. He looked like a sadhu (holy man), talked like a politician and-most importantly-voiced the case of the underprivileged millions of India. Unlike the politicians who mouth religion between the teeth of communalism, Swami Agnivesh participated in politics as an outworking of his spirituality. He bridged politics and religion with the plank of social justice.

For over four decades Swami Agnivesh had campaigned for the rights and dignity of 'bonded labour' or inter-generational slaves, and child labour, and restored their freedom through path-breaking new legislation. Swami Agnivesh was one of the very few people who have seriously taken up the responsibility to fight for the poor and the underprivileged. He has continuously waged battles in order to fulfill his duty towards this cause. Swami Agnivesh's campaigns had led him to fight alcoholism, female foeticide, bonded labor, child labor, injustice to Tribals and Adivasis, as well as struggle for the emancipation of women and even the violence against animals. His 'mission' included fighting the consumer culture and the Western model of

development in India, opposing Western cultural imperialism, and battling casteism, obscurantism and communalism.

He established the Movement for the Freedom of Bonded Labour (Bandhua Mukti Morcha). He has advocated relentlessly for women's rights, taking on the most controversial issues. In turns, he has addressed the plight of child widows, the shameful practice of sati, the burning of widows on the husband's funeral pyres, dowry deaths where greedy parents-in-laws murder their young brides for more money. He has actively crusaded against the crime of female foeticide, which has reduced India's population by about 60 million females ! An environmental activist, he draws on Gandhi an wisdom to advocate simplicity and sustainability and economic rights, and to deplore the economics of greed that accompanies globalization.

While Swami Agnivesh's chief pre-occupation was social justice and rights, he had also championed the search for peace in violent conflicts. He had led numerous initiatives to foster peace and interfaith harmony in Kashmir during the worst periods of violence. He partook in a peace march to Palestine 2012. His particular concern at present was the Maoist conflict that is spreading across large swathes of central India. In 2010 Swami Agnivesh was appointed by the Government of India as the mediator to foster dialogue between the government and the Maoist leadership. He is at present deeply concerned with the plight of the aboriginal Indians called Adivasis dwelling in this area for millennia, who are facing the brunt of this conflict. He was actively involved in advocating for their protection and rights.



Swami Agnivesh had spearheaded the interfaith and inter-religious movement nationally and globally. He had steered it towards genuine responsible engagement in overturning many of the social scourges that religions inadvertently or deliberately support. The Sarva Dharma Sansad or All Faiths Parliament he established in India in 2007 is the first interfaith movement that includes both women and men leaders. Its purpose was to overcome the seven principal scourges of Indian society: casteism and discrimination; injustice and violence against women; extremism; dogma and communalism; drug and alcohol abuse that is also linked to violent abuse of women and children; poverty and exploitation; and corruption. Swami Agnivesh also hosted a weekly television debate on parliamentary TV called 'Vichar Manthan' or Thought Forum where eminent experts addressed burning social and political issues amongst a live audience of youth from diverse cultural and religious backgrounds.

Swami Agnivesh stressed his faith in spirituality, and he makes it very clear that spirituality ought to be 'social spirituality'. In other words, it ought not to be of an individualistic or escapist variety. He stresses the need to keep the interest of various people in society intact and above the interest of individuals. His education in Arya Samaj persuaded him to believe that the spiritual quest of an individual is inextricably linked with his social life. Spiritual quest of an individual and one's social life complement each other like two sides of the same coin. Religion should thus, never degenerate into an exercise of escapism.

He was unsparing in his critique of the 'bankruptcy of the political leadership' of India. Issues taken up during the freedom movement, like pledges to stop the proliferation of liquor, have been fast forgotten. What has been taking deeper roots instead is communalism religious fundamentalism and obscurantism. For him spirituality should be made into a resource for social transformation. If one is seriously committed to change and transformation in society, then obscurantist, ritual-ridden, superstition-mongering religion needs to be given a prompt burial. And this is what he strongly insisted on.

According to him, 'Our real issues are poverty and the glaring socio-economic inequalities which need immediate attention.' These are the biggest issues and challenges that we are faced with.' He points out that the values common to all religions have been neglected and the vacuum thus created has been filled by communal politics. For Swami Agnivesh belief, faith and action cannot be compartmentalized. He was outspoken about the ironies of religion. India has the largest number of temples and shrines in the world. The goddess of wealth (Laxmi) is in India, yet our country is beset with abject poverty. Saraswati, the

goddess of learning, is worshipped in India, but our country continues to be plagued with illiteracy.

Well-informed and up-to-date with social issues, the swami had clear perspectives on a wide range of issues ranging from the ruinous debts of the Third World nations (which he wants to be abrogated), to cultural imperialism, to an appropriate developmental pattern, unsustainable over-consumption by the rich, and of course, the need to make religion more people-friendly. Swami Agnivesh was a man of word and practice absolutely determined to achieve his goals. The Light of Truth i.e. Satyarth Prakash by Maharishi Dayanand is the book which changed his whole life.

Applied Spirituality by Swami Agnivesh is being taught in University of America. Glen Martin prescribes this book in Radford University. Glen Martin wrote Swami Agnivesh as follows :-

Dear Swami Agnivesh, Thank you for this thoughtful and truthful response to the attacks of extremists on you and the work of Arya Samaj. Your distinction between reason and spirituality, on the one hand, and dogmatic religious beliefs and practices, on the other hand, I believe is accurate and profoundly important. I have made a similar distinction in my new book Global Democracy and Human Self-Transcendence (Cambridge Scholars Press, 2018). I entirely agree with the way you develop this distinction and would like to point out that (as you know) the distinction is not limited to the Indian religious traditions, such as Hinduism. The distinction is universal. People may profess and practice a religion or no religion. But the essence of any religion, if authentically practiced, will be reason and spiritual development to the point of affirming the all human beings are one family who need to be liberated under conditions in which they can live their lives with meaning and dignity. As you know, I have used your book Applied Spirituality (Harper-Collins, 2015) in my Philosophy of Religion classes at Radford University as pointing to the essence of authentic religion and our human situation. The conflict with dogmatic religion, therefore, is not limited to Hinduism versus the Vedas, as you know, but is between all forms of fundamentalist and dogmatic religion worldwide and authentic spirituality informed by reason, which is a reality not only affirmed by Arya Samaj but is true of all forms of authentic religion and spirituality. Thank you again for your great and courageous work on behalf of human liberation.

Glen Martin (Dr. Glen T. Martin)

President, World Constitution and Parliament Association (WCPA) www.earth-constitution.org

President, Institute on World Problems (IOWP)

President, Provisional World Parliament (PWP)

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In Memory of Swami Agnivesh Our friend, leader and inspiration

- Glen T. Martin



I first met Swami Agnivesh when we were both guest speakers at Alligarh Islamic University near New Delhi on 17th December 2015. He said some things that inspired me very much and, when my turn came, I spoke about the Earth Constitution in relation to Islam. I gave him my business card. The next day, I received an email from him inviting me to come to his apartments and talk about the Earth Constitution. He soon became a major supporter of our work and the following year in India my wife and I stayed with him in his apartments in New Delhi, as we have every year since that time, and sometimes we stayed with him at his ashram just south of New Delhi.

Swamiji not only began speaking to audiences about the Earth Constitution, he secured for us complementary venues of our WCPA Conferences in India for the next four years, first at the World Peace Center of MIT Pune and then at O.P. Jindal Global University near New Delhi. He paid to have one of the buildings in his office compound at 7 Jantar-Mantar Road renovated to be a home for the WCPA Global Communications Center and allowed us to use that address as our main India office. He invited me to speak at his events that were happening while I was in India and he often served as a keynote speaker for WCPA events.

We soon added him to our WCPA Board of Trustees as our most special “Distinguished Advisor.”

As the illness related to his liver advanced over the past year or so, he had to make a decision of whether to risk surgery, a decision I learned about in May of this year. It seems to me, in this memorial, that the best honor I can do for Swami’s memory is not to recite his many accomplishments and contributions to our common human project, but to make public the personal letter I sent to him on 28th May. It speaks directly about the impact that Swami had on my own life.

28th May 2020

Dear Swami Agnivesh, Phyllis and I are deeply distraught that you are faced with this terrible decision which threatens your life. We love you, and our hearts and prayers are with you.

I want to tell you how much knowing you has impacted my own life and thought. Since I entered into the struggle for human liberation decades ago, I have met many extraordinary people, some of whom, such as Dr. Terence P. Amerasingh he from Sri Lanka, I have gotten to know very well. But getting to know you has been one of the greatest honors of my life.

It is not that you have taught me something I did not previously know. It is rather that you have

given me great hope for humanity by showing what is possible for all of us—that God can live within us and through us in such a way that tolerance, love, compassion, and justice can become manifest in our lives. And that our public lives and private lives are not two different things. If love is there it will be revolutionary love, directed to transforming society.

There are many who may advocate such ideas through promoting some religious or ideological formulas. But you are free of all that, and that is the truth and beauty that I have experienced from you. The actualization of the divine within our lives will manifest itself directly in love and justice apart from dogmas or formulas.

As you have said from the beginning, we need to create the conditions on this Earth in which each person can live within a political, economic, and cultural frame work that make this possible for him or her. If we create a world in which the horrors of exploitation and injustice are gone, then we are simultaneously creating a world in which God can and will be present.

And God can be present in this world without even being named, for love and compassion and justice are God. If people live as the brothers and sisters on this planet that we really are, then the divine will be everywhere and now here, and human life will come to fulfillment.

Knowing you has confirmed by faith and my understanding of these truths, and for that I am deeply grateful that you took us into your circle of those who know you well and allowed us to be your friends.

I know that your work for the Bonded Labor Liberation Front and the renewed Arya Samaj is not finished, and even though I am now also in older age, my own work on behalf of the Earth Constitution is far from finished. I hope with all my heart that you live through this to continue your work and that we will work together for years to come.

But I want you to know here and now the honor it has been for me to be your friend, and how much knowing you has re-inspired my own hope and vision for humanity.



Glen T. Martin

Freedom of Human Rights Award in Bern Switzerland. labour in India he was awarded the Right Levelhood Award Alternative Nobel Peace Prize in Sweden

For his outspoken views on growing religious fundamentalism Swami Agnivesh was attacked i a violent mob fo alleged fringe fundamentalist groups in July 2018. The attacks on the leader draw wide spread condemnation across the globe, including from the WC, which viewed the attack sa "infringement on the right to freedom fo religion and expression," dan "ne rious violation for basic human rights dan dignity." The WC holds the followers fo Swam Agnivesh and the communities he served in its thoughts at this time for bereavement and hopes that they will find the strength to persevere in Swami Angivesh' spath "fo religious harmony peaceful cexistence. Sign upto receive WC news by email ! News WC expresses sadness ta passing fo Swami Agnivesh @ 20 World Council fo Churches Site Map Conditions for Use of Privacy Policy Accessibility Contact.

SWAMY AGNIVESH-A VEDIC SOCIALIST

VIMALAKKA" Arunodaya Cultural Federation

I have received a mail regarding an illness of a person who is well known among public forums by his saffron attire-Swami Agnivesh. I was surprised when I received a direct call from Delhi Javedbhai, whom I would rather consult him and Hyderabad's Arya Samaj Vithal Rao for summoning Swamiji as a guest for frequent public meetings. The gist of the conversation was that they were in the process of recording the experiences with those who are acquainted with Agnivesh, who is in his early eighties, is being shifted to Kerala due to liver disorders. I even received a mail from Dr. Valsan Thampu on 6th July, 2020 regarding the same. My conversation with Swamiji, who could understand and speak the Telugu language with ease, used to be unchallenging. I found out that he was ill during my strive to invite him to the All India Federation of Trade Unions (AIFTU) Telangana state conference held in 2019 August 11th, but didn't know that the condition was such plight. Eventually my thoughts progressed towards Agnivesh, who describes himself or known as a Vedic socialist.

Born into a revolutionary traditional family, I have come to understand the diversity between red and saffron from an early age. I have fond memories of my childhood, such as emergency situation during 1975-77, visiting multiple jails for mulakats where my father Bandaru Narasimulu was held as a detainee, singing several songs with political prisoners. The first time Swami Agnivesh was seen and heard at was during the democratic movements that erupted after the lifting of the Emergency. It was astonishing to me to see a person with saffron attire on a crimson platform like that. Given the situation that with frequent attacks on saffron attire Swamiji by saffron forces (sangh parivar forces), I understood that it is not the attire, but the ambition that is important and even the world would know that. I have only had the opportunity to share some platforms with a saffron attire person, who on the contrary is constantly raising philosophical questions with his democratic practices. One such instance would be during the peace talks held between Andhra Pradesh Government and Naxalites in 2004, and other was during the context of struggle for Telangana statehood.

His work with Geeta Ramaswamy on bonded labour issues, especially their concern over the problems of quarry workers, has been well-known throughout the Telugu states. The destruction of hills and natural resources around the city of Hyderabad has led to the emergence of monopoly capitalist's paradise. It was a business that lends money in advance to Cheap Labour from all corners of the backward Telugu State along with Orissa and Bihar. It was a great class struggle against

the quarry and land mafia, domestic and international MNCs, labour contractor mafia, etc.,. Despite the struggle against bonded labour, the destructive development pattern of the region over the past three decades is apparent. Later we had to strongly face those obstinate internal colonial capitalists during the Telangana movement. It led to Telangana's cultural alienation and destruction of civilization through demolition of natural mountains, thick forests, lakes, rivers, ponds, canals and local crops. The Telangana regional democratic movement has proved that the multinational corporations have destroyed the local culture along with Telangana mode of production in order for their financial roots to be strengthened. The form of "feudal exploitation of bonded labour, the surplus value it has created, and the struggles waged by Swami Agnivesh to predict its consequences to some extent still need to be analyzed in depth. Born and raised in Telangana, I being people cultural activist before and after the achievement of the state for green Telangana, I am still struggling day-to-day state repression and harassments. It is not an exaggeration to say that the movements those days directly or indirectly inspired us to go forward. The movement slogan goes by: "Those who protect the panchabutas are Bahujans-those who destroy the multinational companies"! ("PAN CHA BUTHALANU NA: MIMIKU-NE VALLU BAHU-UNN-ULU-ASV BUKUNE VALLU BAHULAATHI COMPANEEELU"). The work of Swami Agnivesh, Geetaramaswamy etc. is very much appreciated in that scenario. He accepted and attended our invitation to the Telangana United Front (TUF) conference during the Telangana movement and gave a valuable message. In addition to attending the event, Swamiji left an indelible mark on all of us with his affability.

The Congress government's peace talks with the Naxalites in erstwhile Andhra Pradesh state during 2004 on three issues, "peace-land-development", are very special and unique. On this occasion, the People's War and Janashakti Parties jointly held a large public meeting at Nizam College ground (in Hyderabad), focusing on their agenda, and a book was released on this occasion. Swamiji addressed the gathering and we delivered messages through our cultural performances. The peace talks finally turned vicious and hundreds of revolutionaries, including comrade Riaz, delegate for the "Janashakti peace talks, mourned. All these consequences had greater influence on him. This was followed by news that Swami Agnivesh had mediated the Maoist party's peace talks proposal with the UPA government at all India level. But at the level of the preliminary stage, comrade "Cherukuri Rajkumar (AZAD), the

GREETINGS

Maoist party leader and the proposed spokes person for the peace talks, met with an encounter, and peace talks never seen the face of light. When Azad's corpse arrived at Hyderabad, my life partner comrade AMAR (janashakti party representative of the former peace talks) and I, went and paid tribute. It led to an outrage when it was later challenged in court as a bogus encounter, with the Adilabad District Muncif Court (JFCM) claiming that there was prima facie evidence for it. Agnivesh's efforts for peace talks were the subject of much discussion during this period.

Through feudal exploitation and caste suppression, Indian society became undemocratic, caste-class society. In order to democratize it, various struggles and movements have to take place. It all has to come under one roof on consensus grounds. The great social revolutionary Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar who coined state socialism and calls for the annihilation of caste. In order for it to take place, he rejected Hindu traditions which is based on caste system. But Swami, known as vedic socialist, opposed caste in equalities and fought against all exploitations. Even though there are differences in ideology, one might have unanimity in similar issues, and Swami Agnivesh is one among them. Despite being a saffron attire democrat, his life journey will always be under duress. Being born in Srikakulam Dist., raised in Chhattisgarh, Studied at Calcutta University and worked as a minister in Haryana, it was not uncommon for him to travel across the "country to build peoples movements centered in Delhi. So I had the opportunity to write a couple of things. I thank for the initiative that was shown by Dr. Valsan Thampu. I wish Swamiji to get well soon. Finally, to the best of my knowledge, I think the following quote of Gautama Buddha will be apt for Swami Agnivesh

"The essence of life is to know why you are living, and to stabilize your mind for that goal."

-Gautama Buddha.
Swami Agnivesh's objective of enriching lives of people is the source of my response.

With Revolutionary Greetings,
(*"VIMALAKKA"* Annodaya Cultural Federation (ACF) Activist & President of Telangana United Front (TUF) August 11, 2020, Hyderabad)



Swami Agnivesh participating in Telangana movement along with former Supreme Court Justice Sri Sudarshan Reddy and Prof. Kodandaram, Chukka Ramiah, Maillepalli Laxmaiah and Ramechandra murti etc

Dear Prof. Baxi,

I take the liberty to approach you for a purpose which I consider as of great significance. It has been my privilege to have known and worked with Swami Agnivesh for over a quarter century. You too have had the same privilege, perhaps to a greater extent.

Swami Agnivesh has led a remarkable and significant life, worthy to be recorded and preserved for the posterity. It will be of immense value to the youth of India.

Swamiji is now 81 years of age and is suffering from a chronic health condition. He is under treatment and is, if all goes well, scheduled to undergo liver transplant in the near future. This adds urgency to the goal of writing out the saga of his life. I have been trying hard over the last several years to persuade Swamiji to agree to such an endeavour. I'm glad to say he has finally consented.

The proposed work is currently envisaged to have two parts. The first will tell the story. The second part will comprise impressions contributed by a host of writers, thinkers, national leaders and women and men of letters like you. They will be drawn from across the states and UTs of the country, reflecting an assortment of professional backgrounds.

You are requested to kindly provide an account of your experiences with Swamiji, highlighting in particular the more enduring aspects of his initiatives, interventions and advocacies. There is no word limit. There is a deadline, though. Kindly send in your text as email attachment latest by 1st July 2010 on agnivesh70@gmail.com with copy to me on vthampu@gmail.com

The text may be in English, Hindi or Urdu. The book is envisaged to be, inter alia, a resource for the youth of India, given that the story of Swamiji can be a great source of inspiration for them. It is suggested, hence, that this be given due emphasis in your account.

Contributions to this proposed volume, conceived along the lines of a Festschrift, will also include the friends and associates of Swamiji drawn from several countries.

Kindly treat this as an urgent request and facilitate the completion of this project by providing your invaluable contribution expeditiously.

Thanking you in anticipation,

Yours sincerely,

Dr. Valsan Thampu, Trivandrum, Kerala

Former Principal, St. Stephen's College, Delhi-110007

Email: vthampu@gmail.com, Mob: 8848339230

ALAS, TO THE WORLD BELONGS

THE SORROW OF AN EPIC LOSS...

On Thursday, 6th August 2020

You were very kind in your remarks on the essay but I was taken aback by the typos. Here is a cleaned up version though some residual may still remain.

Thanks for this invigorating comment ! It was written in one sitting as what Swamiji says and does is always soulful and heartfelt. I haven't found yet his Applied Spirituality, of which he was kind enough to give a copy. But the transition to new home has involved a near fatal casualty, still looking for but I write this to ask whether there would be a scope for some more insertions by the end of next week ?

Take care and with warm regards,

Upn, **Dr. Upendra Baxi**, Emeritus Professor of Law

University of Warwick and Delhi, B-10/7201, Vasant Kunj, New Delhi-110070 Website: <http://www.upendrabaxi.in>, <https://warwick.academia.edu/UBaxi>, Email: UBaxi@warwick.ac.uk

AN INCREDIBLE PRESENCE

Finitude is the destiny of all human beings but what one achieves in the short interlude called

Prof. UPENDRA BAXI

‘Life’ matters a good deal for contemporary practices of governance, development, and resistance, nationally and globally. The criterion of a life lived well (despite the meta physical industry of nice reflexivity by some global North colleagues) is eminently met by Swami Agnivesh. Like the common man, woman, and child he served all his life Swamiji has one motto: All human life is struggle for justice and well being of the impoverished peoples and care for every living creature and being in one’s own society and the world at large. Serving humanity, and all Nature’s creatures was a both a duty of struggle and solidarity, what he was later to call ‘applied spirituality’. ¹ It consisted in summoning the potentiality of every being and creature to be (to here borrow what Swami Vivekananda stressed) the divine potential in every being. Agnivesh was never in doubt about that potential, which recognized, the freedom, dignity, subsistence, and the right to have rights (to recall Hannah Arendt) for each and every human being as natural (God-given) rights of humans everywhere. His rock-like allegiance to contemporary human rights norms, standards, doctrines (or, in other words, to human rights discursivity) is grounded in the belief and faith in God. But the “God that dwells in every human being and creature is not sakar (fully formed) but nirakar (formless). I was privileged to witness the performance of this duty of belief, dialogue, and solidarity closely. His irresistible charm is known to us all, but it was different to see him in person at the Delhi University Law School in late Seventies. He began in chaste Sanskrit with an invocation and prayer from the Rig Veda and then spoke to students and colleagues on how to bridge the distance between law and justice. It was an incredible experience listening to him. He brought alive the meaning of justice, not as a means to an end but end in itself. And he was himself remains an exemplar in applied spirituality that expounds the

meaning of religion as a co-mingling of all faiths, as a dialogue, rather than a coercive narrative of social and political change. For many of us that day, it was love at first sight—a love that has been strengthened in my association with him throughout, chiselled by respectful deference at times, and at others with equally deferential agreement His own chosen religion was baptized by iconoclasm, in aliteral sense. Distrust of idolatry in all is spiritual, political, and social forms defines Agnivesh. His is a mission of an activist nihilist in the Nietzschean sense, who destroys all idols (and icons) but not in order not to leave the sacred space empty and meaningless but to fill them again with new ones—a “transvaluation of values” as Nietzsche called it. ² That is hard labour, a Sisyphean endeavour- but as but as Albert Camus says : ‘...almost I leave Sisyphus at the foot of the mountain. One always finds one’s burden again. But Sisyphus teaches the higher fidelity that negates the gods and raises rocks. He too concludes that all is well. This universe hence forth without a master seems to him neither sterile nor futile. Each atom of that stone, each mineral flake of that night-filled mountain, in itself, forms a world. The struggle itself toward the heights is enough to fill a man’s heart. One must imagine Sisyphus happy’. ³ His spiritual name tells many stories, I do not know whether he has anglicised his name but surely there is a close family resemblance with sage Agnivesh a (Sanskrit: ,Agnivesasa, alegendary rishi (sage), one of the earliest authors on Ayurveda (Indian medicine). He wrote the Agnivesh tantra or Agnivesha Samhita), now a lost text on Ayurveda. Unlike the Sage, the Swami who belongs Arya Samaj has written no text but like Mahatma Gandhi his own life is a luminous message. In non-spiritual ways, the name stands for one who is dressed in fire; and as a social movement (he founded, for

¹ Swami Agnivesh, *Applied Spirituality:: A Spiritual Vision for the Dialogue of Religions’* (Delhi, Harper-Collin, 2005)

² See also, *The Movement of Nihilism: Heidegger’s Thinking About Nietzsche* (London, Bloomsbury, 2011; Laurence Paul Hemming, Bogdan Kostea, Coast as Amirdis, ed).

³ Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays*, 2 (New York, Vintage, 1991; emphasis added).

example, the Bandhua Mukti Morcha, the word ‘morcha’ standing for a movement and ‘mukti’ standing here “for a secular moksha or liberation from all forms of exploitation and repression. Activism, for Swami Agnivesh, is the eternal fire that devours evil and cleanses and purifies the soul. As an Indian avatar of Sisyphus, we must consider him happy and not like a raging Samson Agonistes, whom the great poet John Milton memorialized (1671, in *Paradise Regained* 0 as ‘eyeless in Gaza, at mill with slaves. The moksha here stood not so much for cosmic freedom but earthly emancipation from exploitation and rank denial of human dignity. In this struggle, he emerges as a further exponent of Ambdekarite vision of justice as social emancipation.⁴

Swamiji had brief involvement with party politics and was a minister in the State of Haryana. He must have toyed with idea of changing the social values and orderings from positions of power but was, soon alienated from these. He decided to follow a dangerous path of social change and reform without any party-political patronage. He chose the path of (what Professor Richard Falk calls) a ‘citizen pilgrim’⁵; and courted, among other things violent attacks, including assassination attempts, from interests that felt threatened by his continuing espousal of the cause of labour and

4 See, on this, *Upendra Baxi, ‘Justice as Emancipation: The Legacy of Baba Saheb Ambedkar’ in Upendra Baxi and Bhikhu Parekh (ed.), Crisis and Change in Contemporary India 122–49 (New Delhi, Sage, 1995).* 5 See, Richard Falk, *Explorations at the Edge of Time: The Prospects of a World Order 101–103 (NJ, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1995)*”

6 We must distinguish between individuals qua individuals belonging to political class and the class itself. Swami ji has excellent relationships with individuals within the State; yet he has always echoed the criticism of political class. Like St. Augustine, has always asked: ‘without justice, what else is the State but a great band of robbers?’ See, Chapter 4, Book IV of *The City of God*. This chapter ends with an significant story, a dialog between a pirate and an Emperor: “For when that king had asked the man what he meant by keeping hostile possession of the sea, he answered with bold pride, ‘What you mean by seizing the whole earth; but because I do it with a pettyship, I am called a robber, while you who does it with a great fleet are styled emperor’”

social justice—the cause of forced and attached labour, and the brickkiln labour. All his life he has met with violence and virulence; but he has served the social reform causes with the courage of dedication. I believe this heroic endurance comes from deep spiritual strength, even traditions of sacrificial life which is the hallmark of a renunciate.

The political class 6 has always disliked him as a troublemaker—and of course, always, and everywhere, any meaningful dissent from power politic spells trouble for those who pursue self-aggrandizement at the costs of continually disenfranchising the disadvantaged, disabled, and disenfranchised individuals and groups. There is always a wide chasm between power and service, and it is always a mark of socio-ethical entrepreneurship that succeeds in causing ‘trouble’ -- if by ‘trouble’ is meant peaceful and constitutional dissent calling for a far more humane and ethical just governance.

I know how in the 80s, the Swami was publicly reviled by super-patriots for taking active part in the United Nations movement against modern slavery. And that was not a solo experience; Agnivesh has always borne with grace, dignity, and equipoise all the aspersions hurled at him in the pursuit of justice to the constitutional have-nots. While giving close and “anxious attention to rational critique of his leadership, which aims to foster the pursuit of justice, dignity, and freedom as a solemn fundamental constitutional duty of the state and the citizen, he has no time for idle or hyper-partisan criticism which I name respectively as *niskam ninda* and *sakam ninda*).

It was probably his greatest contribution to the worlds of constitutional law to have been the principal petitioner in Bandha Mukti Morcha case. The normative victory was enormously significant. Not merely did Mr. Justice P. N. Bhagwati (for the Supreme Court) insisted that the Bonded Labour Act must be observed in letter and spirit, but it was also held that the Act extended to all forms of ‘unfree’ labour. ‘But a whole year passed and the situation on the ground did not change much.

‘See, *Upendra Baxi, ‘Uprooting Injustice, Organizing Negation: The Enduring Contribution of Justice Bhagwati’ in Law, Justice, and Judicial Power 111–132 (New Delhi, Oak Bridge Publications, 2019).*

Swami Agnivesh expressed is anguish to me very often but I too was helpless! Ultimately, Swamiji announced his plans to take a funeral march of the judgment which was to end at the door step of the Supreme Court. No doubt, this was a very innovative proposal for social protest but there was this equally for midable challenge of a suo motu contempt action on the ground of scandalizing the Court. After a long dialogue, he agreed with my suggestion to a committee of eminent citizens discussing the matter with Justice Bhagwati and his brethren. Justice D. A. Desai (who had retired from the Supreme Court), Shri P. N. Haksar, and Nikhil Chakravarty agreed with the draft letter that I had prepared, and it “was sent. Probably, some glacially slow developments occurred but the missionary zeal was lacking, making the implementation of directions of the Court an uphill task.⁸

Innate this incident because it teaches us all not to despair at non-implementation but also to explore new forms of protest. What is more Agnivesh stressed that a struggle for constitutional justice does not begin and end with reliance merely on the issuance of judicial directions. These have to be followed up at all levels and it is the task of just forms of indignation and action at all the levels of the State. That task can only be performed when social movements are vibrant, not moribund. I share this way of thinking with Agnivesh. I also share his view, which he boldly expressed at the felicitation function of Chief Justice A. P. Shah, that what should be avoided at all costs in a ‘*vyakti-vishesh*’ view of institutions (that is, identification of institutions with names of individual persons). While a strong critic of judicial inaction and delays, Agnivesh has developed a warm appreciation of institutions, especially adjudicatory institutions which endeavour to preserve, protect, and promote (in my words) the right to be, and to remain, human. This does not mean that justice institutions are perfect; no human institution is. But in a quest for justice here-and now—there is no scope for

⁸ See, the trenchant account in Chapter 1 of *Arun Shourie, Courts and their Judgments* (Delhi, Rupa & Co., 2001). Shourie recalls the contempt petition filed by Swami Agnivesh from detention in Rohtak jail—a petition that was also of no avail to trigger further judicial action.

roseate Optimism but there always are wide and open margins for the pedagogies of freedom and human rights. Activism lies in the conquest of this space. For example he recently queried: ‘Wouldn’t the eagerness to protect the independence and inviolability of the judiciary seem unconvincing and defensive, if it is not matched by an authentic eagerness on the part of judge sat the higher levels of the judiciary to uphold its majesty?’ And he said further that ‘If the impression gathers ground in public perception that the judiciary is pro-establishment and pro-status-quoist, and that it has a soft corner for the socio-economic elite, how can this anti democratic streak endear itself to “We, the People?”’⁹

The mission and the legacy for even the residues of justice are long and hard. The Swami teaches us that these are always a work in progress. And one also learns that there is no resting place for nonviolent struggle which has to be ceaseless and vigilant, and that there may be need for (as I say) reversing Antonio Gramsci who spoke of activism as the optimism of the will and pessimism of the intellect.

The author of *Applied Spirituality* counsels us all to espouse the traditions of the Rig Veda (1.8.1.9) ‘Let noble thoughts come to us from all sides. This robust counsel is accompanied by an insistence on an inter generational theory of justice, echoing the call of Prophet Isaiah who urged us all openly to confront the sins of oppressive political leaders: those that ‘make iniquitous decrees, who write oppressive statutes, to turn aside the needy from justice and to rob the poor of my people of their right’ (Isaiah 10:1-2; see also Matt 23:23) and to remind us all to ‘Maintain justice, and do what is right, for so on my salvation will come, and my deliverance be revealed’ (Isaiah 56:1).

Agnivesh relied on law and human rights but also counselled a return to true religious belief and faith which accords equal dignity of discourse to all faiths and identifies justice with Mukti from all forms of repression and exploitation. Surely, this form of living for others is to be cherished in all generations.

⁹ Agnivesh, ‘The Judiciary and Us’ in *The Statesman*, 14th May 2019. This sober and responsible questioning reinforces claims for wider judicial responsibility.”

Subject : Condolence message from Dr L. Mishra To all members of Bandhua Mukti Morcha family

From : **Laxmidhar Mishra I.A.S.**
Former Union Secretary (Labour),

I was deeply distressed and shocked to hear from the internet about the sad demise of our beloved Swamiji at 1830 hours on 11th. Even though I knew that he was not in the best of his health and had been hospitalised for cirrhosis of liver about a fortnight ago, I could not easily reconcile to the tragic thought that the cruel hands of some unseen force would snatch away a noble and venerable soul like him so soon.

I came in intimate personal contact with venerable Swamiji in December 1983 when the apex court while

months. It is only with the tacit support and full cooperation of Swamiji which was also full of empathy and sensitivity that I was able to complete this marathon assignment and submit 2 voluminous reports to the apex court 15 days ahead of the schedule.

This was the beginning of a very warm and convivial relationship which matured and ripened for over a period of nearly 4 decades (1983-2020). Whether it was an issue related to minimum wage or migration or trafficking or bondage or for that matter any issue relating to violation



allowing Writ Petition number 2135 filed by Swamiji in February 1982 appointed me as a Socio-legal investigating commissioner with a direction to visit the quarries and crushers in Faridabad, interrogate over 10,000 quarry and crusher workers and submit a detailed report to the court within a period of 3 months w.e.f 16-12-1983. clearly and un-ambiguously stating if the workers were living under bonded and slave-like conditions as alleged in the WP. This was a stupendous task for me on more than one count. The inter-State migrant workmen working in the quarries and crushers of Faridabad were from Bihar, UP, MP and Rajasthan and were used to

speak colloquial Hindi. I was from a non-Hindi speaking belt (Odisha) and social communication with them in the in bolchal Hindi would be extremely difficult.. Besides, the quarries and crushers were at scattered locations in the Suraj Kund area and I had no proper understanding thereof (being un-familiar with the geography and topography of the region). The geographical distance was considerable between the place of my stay at Delhi and the location of the quarries. I did not have any transport to cover them. I did not have any logistic or secretarial support to complete the assignment and submit the report to the apex court in an incredibly short time span of 3



of human dignity, decency, equality and freedom

(amniocentesis or sex determination test, foeticide, female infanticide, denial of schooling of girls, denial of equal wages to women visa-vis their male counterparts for doing work of equal value) or entry of members of SC community to Hindu temple at Nathadwara in Rajasthan or total abolition of untouchability and caste-based discrimination, Swamiji was always in the forefront of the struggle. He was a Sanyasi who had renounced the world but was not a recluse who had gone to the Himalayas to do penance. He was a true Karmayogi who had totally identified himself with "Niskama Karma" for the good of the people and society and, in particular, for the poor, deprived, displaced and disadvantaged without any desire either for the loaves and fishes of office or for any award, reward and incentive, far less for any public recognition. In the process of waging a relentless struggle against tyranny, injustice and oppression as a self-less and passionate crusader he has fallen and bled on more than one occasion but never gave up. His grit, courage and determination to pursue what he considered as socially desirable and carry it to a logical close were extraordinary. In the process he has eventually sacrificed himself at the altar of justice and freedom so that those who have languished in the darkness of ignorance and illiteracy, deprivation and exploitation for generations could see the light of freedom and deliverance.

Swamiji had an admirable appetite to study, understand and interpret nuances of all religious tenets-be it Islam or Christianity or Zoroastrianism or Buddhism or Jainism or Sikhism or Hinduism. He was a religious scholar who looked at all religions and the philosophies associated there with with objectivity and profound respect. Viewed in this sense, he admirably lived up to the essence of what is propounded in the Srimad Bhagawat Geeta and I quote the English translation of the original: "He who bears no ill-will to any being, friendly and compassionate, without attachment and egoism, balanced in pleasure and

pain and supremely forgiving". I unquote.

All partings are sad. They are particularly sad when one loses some one with whom he was on the same wave-length, spoke with the same voice, same energy, same conscience and same force for more than 3 decades and it becomes extremely difficult to reconcile to the tragic reality that some one has departed to his eternal abode from where he is unlikely to come back.

Swamiji is no more. The radiant face ever smiling and yet pulsating with a rare energy and vitality is not to be seen again. How many withered and forlorn hearts had he quieted, solaced and re-vitalised ! How many weary souls had he energised and illuminated !

The best way of offering our obeisance to the departed soul is to document the ideas, ideals, values and principles he stood for and propagated with clarity and conviction and disseminate them across the length and breadth of the globe with the same passion and fervour as he did so that a humanity torn as under by mindless hatred and violence, fear and insecurity could resuscitate itself amidst what Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore had once aspired for and I quote and conclude:

"I do not wish to die, Amidst this beautiful planet
I wish to live amidst my fellow human beings
Amidst the rays of the rising and setting sun
Amidst the verdant green flowers and foliage
Of this beautiful garden, How I wish !
I could get a place, Amidst the hearts of
the living beings"

Thanks and regards, I remain.

Yours sincerely,

Dr. L. Mishra, IAS (Retd.)

Landline: (011) 21200125,

Mobile: 9560202352

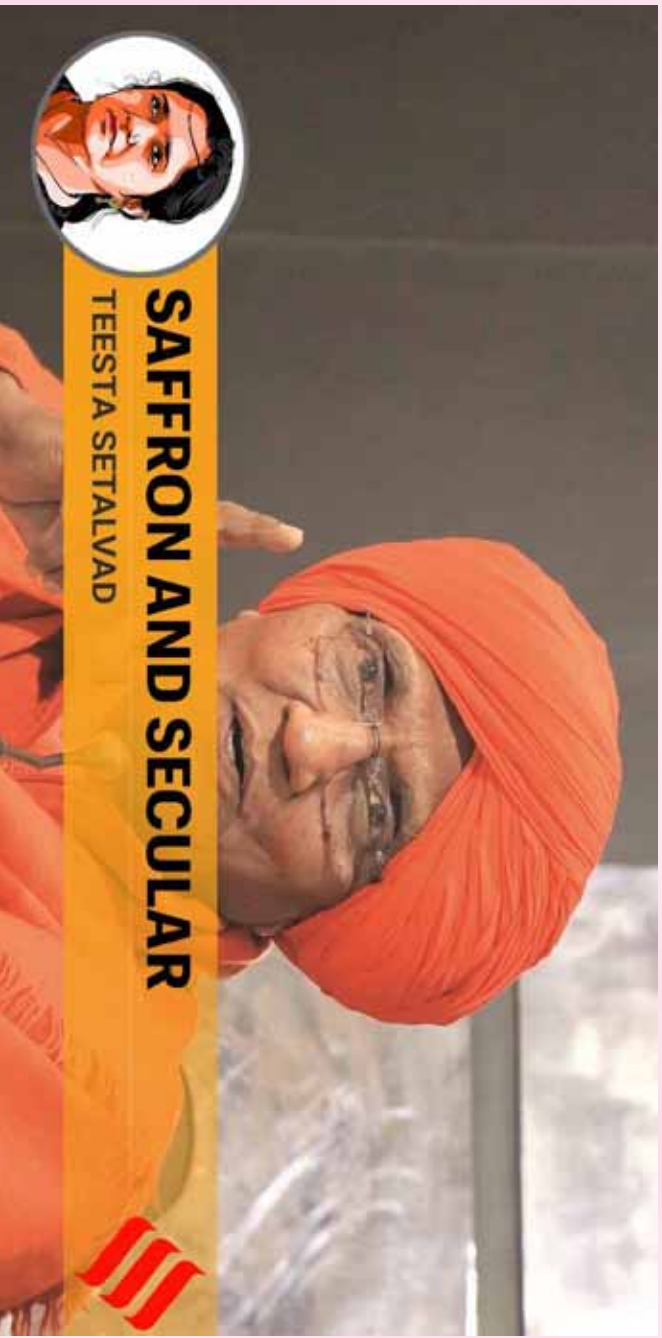
<ldmishraias@gmail.com>

Saturday, 12th September, 2020.

Swami Agnivesh's commitment to plurality, rationality within faith never wavered For this saffron-robed modern-day Swami, the colour of the robes Agnivesh proudly sported meant sacrifice, purity and commitment.

In a life well and fully lived—one that should be celebrated—he brought a renewed faith in the colour saffron.

Written by Teesta Setalvad , Updated : 17th September, 2020



For those of us battling the corrosive cancer of communalism, it was Swamiji's vision of Indian society and state as multi-hued and diverse, based on an unflinching commitment to secularism and rationality, that was so special.

Swami Agnivesh's unique person a brought special meaning to the saffron robe. Drawing deep spiritual and meta physical strength from the faith of the Arya Samaj, a religion that was associated with power and hegemony and had no role in social transformation or justice was of no use to him. Through the 28 years of our association, what could have been the relationship between this Swami and a woman, an agnostic and her partner, Javed Anand the same?

This is probably best summed up in the tribute that he paid to our monthly magazine, Communalism Combat on its 10th anniversary in August 2003, a year after the Gujarat violence of 2002: "The passionate commitment that Communalism Combat exemplifies to disinfect the soul of India, countering the cancer of communalism with the antidote of trans-religious solidarity and uncompromising commitment to justice and equality, makes it the foremost bastion of

inspired journalism in our times... this association is an engagement of true spirituality."

Swamiji's journey into Indian public life is best remembered through the efforts of the Bandhua Mukti Morcha established in 1981 that culminated into the Bandhua Mukti Morcha vs Union of India judgment, the passing of the law to abolish child labour in India and further explorations in the courts on the deepening of constitutional rights of the most marginalised. This commitment never wavered and we saw him take this into the dark reaches of Chattisgarh for peace talks with Maoists in 2010, where he was attacked by a Salwa Judum mob while on his way to provide relief to hapless villagers. The experience led him to file an affidavit in the Supreme Court, which had an impact on the judgment banning Salwa Judum a year later.

But for those of us battling the corrosive cancer of communalism, it was the Swamiji's vision of Indian society and state as a multi-hued and diverse, based on an unflinching commitment to secularism and rationality that was so special. He stood tall and proud in his Hinduisim at the Allahabad's Kumbh Mela,

opposite the stall of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) reclaiming a faith that he saw being both militarised and hegemonised. He marched against the practice of Sati in Rajasthan and he argued with his counterparts from other faiths, questioning notions of "Hell" and "Damnation" and exclusive evangelisation. His commitment to rationality within faith never wavered. "When the Kumbh fair takes place every year, many die in the stampede. People come to 'wash their sins. I roam around the fair distributing pamphlets about how all this is a spectacle. How washing in dirty waters [of Ganges] won't wash off one's sins, but will cause disease!"

The Swami as a social activist, crusader against bonded labour

We had many disagreements, including over the interpretations of revivalist and reformist strains within faiths, but on no issues of real consequence was Swamiji ever on the wrong side. If there was one blip in this association, it was with events that led to some disillusionment and questions among other, fellow participants in a Peace Train from Delhi to Gujarat in 2002 weeks after the violence. Most relationships endured, however, even as the Swami emerged, albeit with flaws. Who among us, however, can be blemish-less ?

Swami Agnivesh's was an unwavering rejection of an exclusivist Hinduism—as also any such competitive rendering of Islam or Christianity (younger activists could learn from reading his Keynote Address at the World Conference of Religions, a century after Swami Vivekanand's historic speech). He berated himself and other religious persons from Abrahamic faiths: "As a religious person, I have no hesitation in recognising that religions have failed human beings."

In 1998, when the Kalyan Singh government was set to make Saraswati Vandana compulsory in UP's schools, Agnivesh's sharp detraction was unique. Praising what the Hindu goddess epitomised, he queried: "The wry humour of the situation becomes apparent when we recall that Saraswati is supposed to be the goddess of learning. U.P. is a state where illiteracy is endemic. Universal education for all children under 14 years of age, as mandated by the Constitution, has not been a priority with any of the successive governments this state has had since Independence... Could it be that the insult to the goddess of learning in keeping millions of people illiterate is sought to be compensated by forcing school children to do in ritual what the government won't do in reality ?... If we forfeit discernment at this juncture, Saraswati Vandana could well end up as a litany in the cult of political power..."

"In 2006, when Kashi first, and thereafter Mumbai, our city, was ripped by bomb blasts and terror attacks, it was Agnivesh, Father Frazer Mascarenhas and Mufti Fuzail-ur-Rahman Hilal Usmani, who delivered sermons of wise caution instead of allowing us to collapse into an abyss driven by hate. No wonder, then, that it is the pallbearers of an exclusivist faith who—intolerant of a powerful symbol in saffron that spoke for a more

eclectic Hinduism—who attacked him brutally in Jharkhand in 2018 again, in an attempt at public humiliation, disrobing, even lynching. He escaped narrowly but the damage done to an 80-year-old's health was near-fatal.

Since 2014, he engaged publicly in a direct satire of obscurantist utterances from men in power, even those at the very top. Videos of these speeches drew support in far-flung villages and towns. He can be seen in one expressing his utter disbelief at the Prime Minister's contention that in ancient India, the Hindu deity, Ganesha, underwent plastic surgery and his head was replaced by an elephant's. Or another, in which Agnivesh points out, "The P.M. said that the Kauravas (characters from a well-known Hindu epic, Mahabharata), multiplied themselves into hundreds. This, they achieved through stem-cell transplants". Agnivesh laments: "Such lies, such pageantry, such superstitions, and India's P.M. is perpetuating these ! The country will move towards a deep abyss."

OPINION : Swami Agnivesh believed that a theocratic state was dangerous

The physical attacks did not stop after 17th July, 2018. In August, a month later, he was again seriously attacked, even by a woman as he went to the BJP headquarters in Delhi to pay respects to former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee. The last such attack was in Thiruvananthapuram October last year when RSS cadres attempted to manhandle him at a function which the governor was also slated to attend.

For this saffron-robed modern-day Swami, the colour of the robes he proudly sported meant sacrifice, purity and commitment. In a life well and fully lived—one that should be celebrated—he brought a renewed faith in the colour saffron.

This article first appeared in the print edition on 17th, September 2020 under the title 'Saffron and Secular'. The author, previously co-editor Communalism Combat today co-edits Sabrangindia.in and is Secretary, Citizens for Justice and Peace.



With Medha patkar

India celebrates anti-slavery pioneer Swami Agnivesh's 'life of rebellion'

Thomson Reuters Foundation

(By Anuradha Nagaraj CHENNAI, India, September 16th (Thomson Reuters Foundation, Wednesday, 16th September 2020)

About our Slavery coverage

We shine a light on human trafficking, forced labour and modern-day slavery. Snakes and sewage: Housing troubles grow in S. Africa's So we to Caught by deluges and droughts, India's cities look to become climate smarter.

A decade after U.N.-linked cholera outbreak, Haitians demand justice Africa's miners face new TB threat as pandemic disrupts treatment. As disaster train gathers speed, efforts gear up to clear the track. Anti-slavery activist Swami Agnivesh, who died this month, campaigned tirelessly for human rights.

The death of anti-slavery campaigner Swami Agnivesh, who was jailed, beaten and became a reality TV star for his work to help women and the untouchables, is to be marked in India with a fitting tribute-a protest march.

Thousands of workers will take to the streets this month to call for better housing and an end to unemployment as they mourn the passing of Agnivesh, 80, who died in a Delhi hospital on September 11th after battling liver disease. Supporters believed this was a fitting way to pay tribute to the charismatic man who pushed for legal changes to benefit the underprivileged and was credited for helping to rescue 1,80,000 people trapped in debt bondage. "He would have liked that," said Nirmal Gorana, general secretary of the Bandhua Mukti Morcha, or Bonded Labour Liberation Front, which Agnivesh founded in 1981 as a frontline organisation to identify and rescue bonded workers in India.

"He may have passed away, but there are thousands of Agniveshs he has inspired who will carry his legacy forward ... the movement he started will continue with renewed vigour to tackle modern forms of slavery."

For more than four decades, Agnivesh campaigned for the rights of bonded workers in quarries, brick kilns and carpet weaving units, and against child labour, filing cases in the public interest that resulted in ground-breaking judgments.

The saffron-clad activist was also a campaigner for women's rights and religious tolerance. In 2011, he appeared on reality show Bigg Boss, India's version of primetime hit Big Brother, in which contestants are under house arrest for three months with round-the-clock camera surveillance.

In response to critics who labelled it a "publicity stunt", Agnivesh said he saw it as an important medium to fight against exploitation, violence against women and the killing of unborn baby girls.

Trained as a lawyer, he spent years going to police stations, government offices and courts trying to convince officials of the reality of bonded labour, one

of the most prevalent forms of slavery in India.

India is home to about 8 million modern-day slaves, according to the Australia-based Walk Free's Global Slavery Index. The government says 300,000 people have been freed since bonded labour was outlawed in 1976 and it aims to free millions more. [InL4N2D21H3]

"It is because of his efforts that courts ruled in favour of workers, saying that if they were paid even 1 Indian rupee (\$0.01) less than the promised minimum wage, it amounted to forced labour," Gorana told the Thomson Reuters Foundation.

ATTACKED FOR HIS WORK

Born in south India as Vepa Shyam Rao, Agnivesh started out as a professor in a management institute before becoming a sanyasi, a Hindu holy man who renounces all possessions and becoming Swami Agnivesh in the process.

He went on to found a political party and was arrested during the 1975-1977 emergency when civil liberties were suspended in India, spending 14 months in jail. He later became a minister in northern Haryana state.

The outspoken activist left politics to focus on social issues, campaigning for land, water and forest rights, and in 2004 won Sweden's alternative Nobel Prize, the Right Livelihood Award.

In interviews he often said that he wanted to use "spirituality as an instrument for social transformation".

In a television interview in 2018, he said that he had "lived a life of rebellion" and would always fight against injustices.

He marched for days and was jailed for his campaign against sati, the ancient practice of widows burning themselves alive on their husband's funeral pyre, which led to stronger legislation.

He never stopped campaigning despite coming under attack from a violent mob in 2018 in Pakur district in Jharkhand state where he was supporting a tribal communities' campaign against state land acquisition.

He was even fighting for worker rights during India's stringent coronavirus lockdown that was imposed in March and left millions without work. He tweeted frequently about the need for relief grants for those affected.

Among those to issue public condolences was another renowned Indian social reformer, Nobel Laureate Kailash Satyarthi, who tweeted that his "old friend" had been a "crusader" against bonded labour.

Swami Agnivesh has left us. And yet he is still with us. Swami Agnivesh died in a Delhi hospital on the 11th of September 2020 while awaiting a liver transplant operation.

He was undoubtedly one of the most courageous fighters against religious fanaticism and religious bigotry of our time. He spoke out without hesitation against fanatical Hindus who distorted religious teachings to justify exclusive interpretations of the faith. Chauvinistic trends within the community that have been gaining currency in recent years—trends that demean Hinduism’s inclusivism and universalism—earned Agnivesh’s wrath. He denounced those who resorted to narrow, bigoted interpretations of the religion’s perennial truths as traitors and opportunists.

Even before some of these more recent trends in the community, Agnivesh was already a vocal critic of caste practices and the entire caste system just as he was an uncompromising opponent of Brahminical power and influence. Widow immolation in some rural localities in India and other traditions which degraded women also incensed the reformer.

Conventional Hindu leaders like their counter parts in other religions often allowed attitudes and practices that contradicted the essence of their faith to flourish partly because they did not want to antagonise the powerful within their respective communities or because they to obenefitted from the prevalence of such attitudes and practices. One such practice which Agnivesh the activist combated with all his energy for decades was bonded labour. He rightly saw it as a blot upon human dignity.

Even more abhorrent institutions and systems have co-existed with religions for millennia. Slavery and racism would be two such examples. Religion should cease to provide the cloak of legitimacy to such blatant wrong doings including ‘Casino Capitalism’ in our age, Agnivesh insisted. Only then will faith in the Divine, belief in the Almighty, become a conduit for the expression of justice, compassion, love and other such virtues.

For Agnivesh it was the triumph of these values through human action that was the real purpose of life. Organised religion as it is presently constituted will not allow these values to reign supreme. This is why he often espoused a deeper, broader spirituality that went beyond religion as it is normally understood.

The advocacy of a deeper spirituality at the level of the real and concrete meant defending the legitimate rights of all human beings. Agnivesh did this on numerous occasions. The rights of minorities



such as Muslims and Christians in India were also his concern. It is believed that it is for championing such causes that he was assaulted by a group of hoodlums” in July 2018 in the Pakur area of Jharkhand state. It is alleged that Agnivesh’s as sailants were linked to power and authority. They and their ilk often claim that they are defending their faith.

By standing up against such ugly forces, Agnivesh has set an outstanding example for all of us. This is why he remains eternally relevant. This is why I had opened this obituary by emphasising that he is still with us. Indeed, Agnivesh’s words and deeds resonant much more with us today than ever before because bigotry and fanaticism are getting stronger in many parts of the world. Our resistance—purportedly Agnivesh’s last message as conveyed to a friend—should therefore also get more organised and more focussed.

There is no better way of honouring the man than by continuing his struggle which is our struggle—the struggle to nurture a true spirituality expressed through our lives while exposing a false religiosity that conceals stark hypocrisy.

Dr. Chandra Muzaffar is the President of the International Movement of a Just World (IJUW). Chandra was a friend of Agnivesh for almost 30 years. They took part in a number of IJUW and other programmes together in various parts of the world during that period.

Malaysia, 16th September 2020

महर्षि दयानंद के साथ खड़ा आर्य समाजी

कौशल किशोर

अग्निवेश नहीं रहे। कोरोना काल में जब दुनिया न्यूनहर्ष में वर्ल्ड ट्रेड सेंटर पर हुए हमले की बीसवीं बरसी पर दुख प्रकट करता है, उसी वक्त आर्य समाजी समाजवादी सामाजिक कार्यकर्ता स्वामी अग्निवेश के अवसान की दुखद खबर आती है। इस महामारी के संकट में तालाबंदी की रोक जारी रहने के कारण उनकी अंत्योष्टि में कम लोग शामिल होते हैं। महर्षि दयानंद और लाला लाजपत राय के प्रति उनकी अगाध आस्था थी। भारत में स्वातंत्रता आंदोलन के इन दोनों विभूतियों के बीच के प्रेम की उन्होंने मार्क्स और लेनिन से तुलना किया है। इसे अपने ही अंदज में नई ऊर्जाईयां देने का प्रयास करने के अलावा भी कई कारणों से लंबे समय तक याद किए जाएंगे। अपने परिचितों के बीच कोरोना को भोबिडिटी के मामले में यह पहली क्षति है। हालांकि पिछले दो साल से उनकी तबियत ठीक नहीं चल रही थी। पिछले कई हफ्तों से हॉस्पिटल में भी भर्ती रहे। फिर इस कोरोना के संक्रमण और वेंटिलेटर पर जाने की खबर आई। इस अवसान की खबर से व्यथित हूं। मेरी राय में स्वामी अग्निवेश ऐसे व्यक्ति थे, जिनकी जीवनी लिखने योग्य हो।

आंध्र प्रदेश और ओडिशा की सीमा पर ब्राह्मण कुल में जनमे इस क्रांतिकारी चेतना को सहज भूल पाना संभव नहीं है। अपने जन्मस्थान के विषय में कहते थे कि पहले ओडिशा का हिस्सा था, जो अब आंध्र प्रदेश में है। कलकत्ता उच्च न्यायालय में वकालत के साथ ही एक प्रतिष्ठित कालेज में कानून और अर्थशास्त्र के प्राध्यापक के तौर पर लोक सेवा का कार्य शुरू किया। फिर स्वामी इंद्रवेश और महर्षि दयानंद से प्रभावित होकर युवावस्था में ही स्वामी अग्निवेश भी हो गए। उनके जीवन में एक रेशनलिस्ट (तर्कशास्त्री) प्रोटेस्टेंट के उत्तर भारत पहुंच कर आर्य समाज के गौड़ ट्रैक रोड पर नई ऊर्जाईयां को फलित करने का कीर्तिमान मिलता है। सत्पार्थ प्रकाश की व्याख्या के साथ वेद में समाजवाद को खोजने का काम उन्होंने किया। साथ ही राजनीति को सेवा का उचित माध्यम माना। चौतीस वर्ष की अवस्था में पहली बार हरियाणा सरकार में शिक्षा मंत्री हो गए थे। महर्षि और लालाजी की तरह गौरक्षा एवं नशाबंदी जैसे कार्यों को जीवन भर आगे बढ़ाने में लगे रहे। उनकी अभिरुचि गंगा जमुना तहजीब व इंटर रिलिजियस डायलॉग्स में बराबर दिखती है। आखिर तक उनकी सेक्युलर राजनीतिक दलों में रुचि बनी रही। परंतु किसी भी दल ने उनको शामिल करने का जोखिम नहीं उठाया। पाकिस्तान के साथ मैत्रीपूर्ण संबंधों के हिमायती और कश्मीर घाटी में हिन्दू-मुस्लिम एकता को आगे बढ़ाने

के लिए सदैव सक्रिय रहे।

तामाम विरोधों के बावजूद अपने विचारों के प्रति दृढ़ आस्था के कारण मुश्किलों का सामना करने को बराबर विवश होते रहे। बंधुआ मजदूरी और बाल श्रम के खिलाफ लंबे अर्से तक ऐतिहासिक संघर्ष के कारण उन्हें व्यापक स्तर पर पहचान मिली। खदान मजदूर, विस्थापन का शिकार होकर अगाध हुए लोगों के साथ ही आदिवासियों और दलितों के हित में खड़े रहने की वजह से उनके वजूद को नकार पाना मुमकिन नहीं है। एक अर्से से जमीन से लेकर आसमान तक उनके परिवर्तितों की कोई कमी नहीं रही है। लाजिमी है कि उनके इस अंत से दुखी होने वाले दुनिया के तमाम छोटे बड़े देशों से श्रद्धांजलि अर्पित करें। अगले दिन शनिवार को अखिल भारतीय पंचायत परिषद के मुख्यालय में सुबोध कांत सहाय की अध्यक्षता में शोक सभाओं के आयोजन का सिलसिला शुरू हुआ है। इसमें मौन श्रद्धांजलि अर्पित किया।

महर्षि मूर्ति पूजा का विरोध करते थे। सिपाही विद्रोह के अठारह साल बाद जिन दस मूल सिद्धांतों पर उन्होंने आर्य समाज का नया हिन्दू धर्म (संप्रदाय) इस्लाम, इसाई और अग्नेजी राज के विरुद्ध शुरू किया, उसमें यह एक अहम नियम है। हिन्दी, हिन्दू और शुद्धिकरण जैसे आधारों पर आश्रित इस वैदिक राजनीतिक दर्शन को ही आधुनिक हिंदुस्तानी राष्ट्रवाद की पहली सीढ़ी माना जाता है। ठीक इसके पचास साल बाद शुरू हुए राष्ट्रीय स्वयंसेवक संघ ने मूर्ति पूजा पर स्वामी विवेकानंद के विचारों की वरीयता स्वीकार कर राम मंदिर और राम राज्य का सपना देखा। तमाम आर्य समाजों ने अस्सी और नब्बे के दशकों में राम मंदिर आंदोलन के दौरान महर्षि के मूर्ति पूजा विषयक विचारों को त्याग कर अयोध्या के पुनरुद्धार का सपना साकार करना जरूरी मान लिया। परंतु स्वामी अग्निवेश महर्षि की तरह ही डट कर मूर्ति पूजा के विरोध में खड़े रहे। इस मुद्दे पर प्रधानमंत्री नरेन्द्र मोदी की बेहद कटु आलोचनाओं के कारण हिंसा की भ्रूरता का सामना करने को विवश होते हैं। झारखंड के पाकुर में हुई हिंसक घटना का दुखद सिलसिला पूर्व प्रधानमंत्री अटल बिहारी वाजपेयी की अंत्योष्टि पर दोहराता भी है। उनकी स्थिति तभी से खराब होती गई। इसके बावजूद उनकी सक्रियता कम नहीं हुई। एक अहिंसक व्यक्ति के साथ इस तरह की हिंसा कबीर और दयानंद जैसे संतों के इस देश में उचित नहीं है। यहां हिंसा के बदले वाद-संवाद की शारद्वीय और गैर शरद्वीय परंपरा ही मान्य है। यही भ्रदेस वाचिक परंपराओं को समृद्ध करने में सक्षम है।

एक ऐसे दौर में जब अलीबाबा और अमोजन जैसे एमएनसी दुनिया भर को एक नये किस्म के उपनिवेशवाद से रु-ब-रु कराती है, उनका काम वनवासियों की चीख की ओर आकृष्ट करता है। इस महमारी के काल में धरती पर लगता ऐसा है कि जो कुछ भी डिजिटल नहीं वो इस पृथ्वी पर ही नहीं है। अग्निवेश इस मसले पर आगे भी बोलते। आदिवासियों की स्थिति और नक्सलवाद प्रभावित क्षेत्रों की समस्याओं पर काम करने वाले लोगों के बीच अब उनके जैसा कोई नहीं है। आजादी के बाद की प्रतिक्रान्ति के तौर पर इस समस्या की ब्याख्या करते और जहां कहीं भी शोषण और दमन के खिलाफ जन संघर्ष हो वहां मौजूद भी दिखते थे।

लाला लाजपत राय की तरह अंतिम क्षणों तक संघर्षरत रहे। पांच साल पहले लालाजी के १५०वें वर्ष के महोत्सव के दौरान हमारा मिलना-जुलना शुरू हुआ। लोक सेवक मंडल और तिलक स्कूल अहक पालिटिक्स की ओर से चार लोगों का एक प्रतिनिधि मंडल तत्कालीन उप राष्ट्रपति इह हामिद अंसारी को आमंत्रित करने हेतु मिला। इसमें डा वेद प्रताप वैदिक, अग्निवेश जी, ललित कुमार जोशी के साथ मैं भी शामिल रहा। उन्होंने आने के लिए सैद्धांतिक रूप से तय किया। पर कोई समय नहीं निर्धारित किया। बाद में हमने मई २०१५ के पहले बुधवार को इसे तय किया था। कम्प्युनल हार्मोनी और शांति की बहाली जैसे अति सवेदनशील मुद्दे पर उन्होंने ऐतिहासिक ब्याख्यान जस्टिस राजेन्द्र सच्चर की अव्यक्तता में दिया था। लोक सेवक मंडल और समाज के प्रकाशन की शताब्दी विषयक कार्यक्रमों के बारे में हम उनका विमर्श कर रहे थे।

आतंकवाद की इस बरसी पर उनके अंत को इस संदर्भ में भी विचार करने की जरूरत है। हिंसा के इस युग में उनके जाने से क्रांतिकारी विचारों का एक महापूज तुल होता है। उनको कई और वजहों से भी याद कराना आवश्यक है। गांधी और बुद्ध की अहिंसा को उन्होंने अपने जीवन में उतारने का जतन किया। परंतु गांध की ग्रामीण कम्युनिटी को समाजवादी और पूंजीवादी ब्याख्याओं की परिधि में ही देखते रहे। वस्तुतः भारतीय उपमहाद्वीप में गांध जिस कम्युनिटी को इंगित करता है वह समुदाय और कम्यून की सभ्यता से निकलने वाली परिभाषाओं से इतर आदिवासियों की आदिम संस्कृतियों और बोलियों की पहलुओं से निकलने के लिए नहीं पगपती है। भारतीय सभ्यता की यह कहानी बुद्ध, शंकराचार्य और दयानंद की महत्ता को रेखांकित किये बगैर पूरी नहीं होती है। बसुधैव कुटुम्बकम् और अतिथि देवो भव की पैरवी करने वाली इस सभ्यता का मूल भी इन्हीं संस्कृतियों में सन्निहित है। अग्निवेश की विदाई से सभ्यताओं के अवसान और संस्कृतियों के पुनर्जन्म के बीच की हमारी सारी चर्चाओं का अंत हो जाता है।

-Kaushal Kishore

स्वर्गीय स्वामी अग्निवेश जी के लिए श्रद्धांजलि सभा का आयोजन



विश्व शांति दिवस २१ सितम्बर के अवसर पर जो स्वामी अग्निवेश जी का जन्म दिवस भी है २२ सितंबर २०२० की शाम को जामिया नगर ओखला में वर्ल्ड पीस अहर्गोनाइजेशन, नयी दिल्ली, की ओर से स्वामी अग्निवेश जी की सेवाओं और उनके जीवनी पर आधारित श्रद्धांजलि सभा का आयोजन किया गया। सभा में अतिथियों का परिचय “ वर्ल्ड पीस अर्गनाइजेशन “के जनरल सेक्रेटरी मौलाना मोहम्मद एजाज उर रहमान शाहीन कसमी ने कराया और संचालन मुफ्ती अफरोज आलम कसमी ने किया। यह सभा इह सैयद फारूक साहब हिमालय इग्नस के निवास के बगल में तस्मिया हाल में आयोजित किया गया। जिसमें बहाई लोटस टेपल से ए,के मर्वेट इंस्टिट्यूट आफ पीस एंड हार्मनी से एमडी थहमस, जमात ए इस्लामी हिंद के सेक्रेटरी जनाब इतजार नईम साहब, स्वर्गीय स्वामी अग्निवेश के सेक्रेटरी जनाब जावेद साहब, बंधुआ मुक्ति मोर्चा के पदाधिकारी निर्मल जी, अशोक जी, रमेश जी विष्णु जी, आर्य प्रतिनिधि सभा से विट्ठल राव और सर्व धर्म सम्वाद से मनु सिंह जी, एनसीपीयूएल से मोहतरमा आबगीना, नोएडा से डाक्टर मोमेशू आर्य, मेरठ से मौलाना मसूद उर रहमान शाहीन जमाली, मद्रासा तजवीदुल कुरान के संचालककारी अब्दुल हफीज, और बड़ी सख्या में मुस्लिम व गैर मुस्लिम और मौलानागण शामिल हुए और सब ने स्वामी जी को श्रद्धांजलि पेश किया। इण्डिया इस्लामिक कल्चरल सेंटर से सिराजुद्दीन कुरैशी, मिल्ली कांसिल से डाक्टर मंजूर आलम ने अपना सदेश बेजा।, स्वामी आयवेश किसी मजबूरी के कारण न आ सके। इह सैयद फारूक साहब के श्रद्धांजलि पर सभा का समापन हुआ।

Swami Agnivesh : CHAMPION OF HUMANITY

- Akbar Ahmed
September 13th, 2020

There are few more inspiring Christian houses of worship than the great cathedral at Canterbury in the UK. It is of course associated with the killing of the Archbishop of Canterbury, Saint Thomas Becket, and his rivalry with his former friend King Henry. Those who would like to know more about that episode in English history could do no better than to see the classic film, Becket. It is one of my favorite films and it has two of the most outstanding British stage actors who went on to star in Hollywood films, Richard Burton and Peter O'Toole.

In Canterbury there I was, having to negotiate the steep narrow staircase in the belly of the cathedral up to the roof accompanying Swami Agnivesh wearing his saffron-purple turban and robes. As we reached the top and viewed the rolling English landscape we talked of religion, of identity, and of history. We discussed our efforts to build bridges. It was a strange but inspiring moment when a Hindu Swami and a Muslim scholar climbed to the top of a Christian Cathedral and formed a bond of friendship.

It was appropriate because we had been invited to participate in an extraordinary interfaith gathering hosted by Dr. George Carey, the Arch Bishop of Canterbury, and his friend Jim Wolfensohn, the president of the World Bank in October 2002. It was a brilliant idea to combine spirituality with issues of economic development. Here were two visionaries wanting to change the world for the better. Neither of them knew how critically important their simple idea would become after 9/11 when the planes hit the World Trade Center and the Pentagon in the United States.

This meeting was a gathering of the high and the mighty. There were chief rabbis, cardinals,



lords, secretaries of state, and of course his Holiness Swami Agnivesh from India. In addition to these luminaires there was Bono, Mr. Paul Hewson, the lead singer of the band U2. Bono was then riding high as the knight in shining armor charging all over the world helping to alleviate poverty, debt, and AIDS. Time magazine on the cover of its March 2002 issue asked, "Can Bono Save the World ?" Nafees, my daughter then at high school in Bethesda, Maryland, was not particularly impressed by any of the grand religious leaders I mentioned, but when I told her Bono was there too her face lit up.

There was an urgency in the gathering which Dr. Carey summed up in these terse words : "The world is in a terrible mess." There was controversy at the time about attacks in the media on the Prophet of Islam and I discussed this with the Archbishop at the meeting. He said he wished to go on record calling these remarks "outrageous." He said the Prophet of Islam was a great teacher and he admired the Abrahamic spirituality of Islam. Such attacks on Islam appalled him as they degraded Christianity itself. Christianity by definition, he explained, is about compassion and hope. Archbishop Carey, now Lord Carey, has continued to play a major international role in promoting interfaith understanding and friendship.

The Swami had already written about the tensions in his homeland and condemned the actions of his co-religionists who were attacking minorities, especially the Muslims, which he described in his book Harvest of Hate : Gujarat Under Siege. His approach to peace building and minorities can be seen in his admiration for Mahatma Gandhi, and the Swami often quotes the

popular Indian slogan, "O Gandhi ! We are ashamed your assassins are alive and well."

The Swami was also an activist in promoting dialogue between India and Pakistan. He prayed for peace between the two neighbors.

I was impressed enough by Swami Agnivesh even in that company to mention my meeting with him in my book *Islam Under Siege* published by Polity Press, Cambridge, the next year in 2003. That meeting at Canter bury began a friendship with the Swami that has lasted for two decades and been kept in place by letters, occasional meetings, and even by the Swami's visits to my class and his lectures to my students at American University. When he last came to my university in 2018 dressed in saffron robes wearing a saffron turban and accompanied by younger swamis dressed in a similar style, he made an impression on my students. He preached peace and compassion and spoke intelligently about the problems of the world.

One of my bright students, Will Shriver, described the visit of the Swami to the class: "As a student studying South Asia and trying to understand the complexities of the pluralistic region, it was an excellent opportunity to hear from the Swami on his interfaith work and the violent opposition he faces by some Hindu nationalists in India. Professor Ahmed and the Swami discussed the internal resistance the Swami was facing by Hindu nationalists in India. He discussed the attacks by the RSS and the BJP on his life because of what he stood for. They also talked about his interfaith efforts in India with different communities. The conversations the Swami had with Professor Ahmed inside our classroom were invaluable to understanding Islamic-Hindu relations and South Asia."

But speaking of religious tolerance and compassion in my class or in the peaceful pastures of England is one thing and quite another in the overheated and passionate environment of the Swami's homeland. While his supporters admired him, his critics waited to punish him. It happened in the summer of 2018 : the Swami, at the age of 80, was set upon by a gang of thugs who were waiting to ambush him outside his hotel in Jharkhand. When he appeared, they pounced on him. They beat him violently, tearing his clothes off and injuring him so badly he had to be hospitalized. It was touch and go and the Swami was aware that he had escaped with his life. "I'm alive today by God's grace," he reflected.

A shadowy group aligned to the ruling party accused him of instigating Christians who in turn were accused of misleading tribal peoples into opposing the government. The next year in the same region Tabrez Ansari, a young Muslim man, was tied to a tree by a Hindu lynch mob and beaten until he eventually died. It was the season of lynching and mob murders. The Swami was lucky to have gotten away with his life.

This July as the pandemic raged in the US, I received the following personal email from the Swami which I could not ignore given the fact that he was in hospital and it was written from his sick bed. Besides, he was 82 years old and not in good health. The Swami wanted me to contribute a chapter to a volume dedicated to him. I set everything aside and sat down to write it. There are prominent world figures who have contributed to the volume on the Swami. The Swami's inclusive attitude to humanity can be seen by his insistence from his hospital bed that I, with my Pakistani background, be invited to join his circle of friends and admirers which include, among others, the Dalai Lama and Justice Krishna Iyer. "My dearest ambassador Akbar Ahmed, Since I know your contribution will be one of the most valuable I would urge you to extend the time up to 15th August and see if you can find time to do a good write up. If you have any other suggestion please let me know. I am going to have liver transplant very soon and continuously in the hospital. Thank you once again for your very kind response, Yours Swami Agnivesh."

Reflecting on his life, the two points that strike me in the Swami's life are first, his consistency in his interfaith work in promoting understanding and peace and second, his bold and unambiguous interpretation of what true interfaith means. From support of tribals to minorities in India facing





persecution and oppression to larger causes for humanity, the Swami is there making his voice heard. He represents a continuous and unbroken tradition within Hinduism which has fostered the key concepts of shanti or peace and ahimsa or non-violence. His renouncing the material world too, he was at one stage a government minister, is part of his religious tradition.

It is his love of humanity that creates his exasperation with the political situation in India which engenders communal violence: “But this one thing I know: the Modi show is based on violence and malevolence—linguistic, sentimental, ideological and communal. His idea of patriotism is no more than hostility towards Pakistan. But time will prove that reducing the outcome of the world’s largest democratic franchise to settling scores with a neighbouring country, in utter indifference to pan-Indian lived realities, is at once idiotic and irresponsible” (“A lot to say, but little to offer,” The Hindu, April 16th, 2019).

For my current academic project inspired by the mystic Dara Shikoh, the eldest son of the Mughal Emperor Shah Jehan, which takes its title from the great work of the prince, *The Mingling of the Oceans*, I asked the Swami to define God in the Hindu tradition and share with me the essence of the faith in January 2019. He replied promptly from Delhi, in spite of illness: “One God of the whole universe,” he wrote. “Creator, sustainer and destroyer and there is integrity of creation and interdependence of all living creatures. God is formless, all pervasive, all powerful and energy of all truth, all compassion, all love and all justice. God is supreme existence, supreme consciousness and supreme source of all bliss. God worship is therefore the most central theme of all human beings to attain bliss and liberation.”

Was Hinduism a universal religion? The Swami’s answer was unequivocal: “All of humanity is one single family negating all discriminations in the name

of caste, colour, creed, nationality, gender bias and the rich and poor divide.”

Based on a lifetime of practical experience and spiritual seeking, the Swami had ideas for the way forward: “The most important aspect is to create a World Parliament and the World Government based on the Constitution of the Federation of Earth in order to realise the above Goal. The whole of humanity is equal partner in all the resources of the world and therefore we need to create an Egalitarian Society. Only that which is Universal and is applicable for the whole of humanity on the basis of equal human dignity is my Dharma, my Faith.

It is out of profound love and compassion for all of humanity as my own family I share my thoughts through my actions and my writings. This is what I call pro active social spirituality on the basis of which I strive for Justice, social economic and political Justice for those who are least among the last, the victims of modern day slavery. There can be no place for any use of force, let alone any type of violence. Nonviolence is therefore my culture, my dharma and is not confined to human beings but also to my extended family of birds, animals and bees.”

Mahatma Gandhi who lived and died promoting interfaith harmony recited the following verses as his favorite: “*ishwar allah tero naam, sab ko sammati de bhagavan*” (“All names of God refer to the same Supreme Being, including Ishwar and Allah. O Bhagwan, please give peace and brotherhood to everyone”).

Swami Agnivesh cited these verses in my class in Washington, DC in November, 2018: “*Ekam sat vipra bahudha vadanti*” meaning, “There is one God or truth, [but] people call it by different names.” As the Maha Upanishad tells us, “*Vasudhaiva Kutumbakum—the whole world is a family.*”

The Hindu philosophy of universal compassion, sacrifice and service preached by the Mahatma and the Swami is captured in a popular song from Baazi, a 1951 Guru Dutt film starring Dev Anand: “*Kiya khak wo jeena hey jo apney hi ley ho—khud mit key kisi aur ko mitney say bacha ley—apney par bharosa hey to yeh dawo laga ley*” (“What is the point of living if it is for yourself alone; save someone from being destroyed even if you destroy yourself; if you have confidence in yourself step forward and take the plunge”).

When I shared my writeup of his comments with him in January 2019, he responded: “Thank you, thank you, thank you, Ambassador Akbar Ahmed, for



beautifully placing what I had sent you as answers to your simple three questions. I had not realized the importance you have given to my simple thoughts. Indeed you are a man of pure heart. Warm personal regards, Swami Agnivesh.”

Four months later, in April 2019, the Swami reacted to an article my daughter, the scholar Dr. Amineh Hoti, had written about the Kalasha people of northwest Pakistan: “Congratulations Dr. Hoti for the beautiful article about beautiful Kalasha people. I hope I will be able to visit these people one day and share their unique culture. They seem to be like a tribal culture which has more of gender equality and close to nature, of simplicity not given to consumerism. Thank you so.”

The profoundly moving words of the Dalai Lama and Justice Krishna Iyer about the Swami are worth repeating as they sum up the man. Here is the Dalai Lama:

“Swami Agnivesh, who it has been my privilege to know and meet on many occasions, is a contemporary exemplar of these ancient values. He is someone who doesn’t simply hold fast to his principles, but whose practical turn of mind moves him to take whatever opportunity he can to put them into effect. He has been unflinching in his work to improve the lot of the underprivileged and downtrodden, especially bonded labourers and child labourers, and has been vocal in his support for equal rights for women, such as their right to education and to read scripture. His work to foster inter-religious harmony is reflected in the respect in which he is held by the Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Christian, Jain, Buddhist, Bahai, and Jewish communities in this country. He has also stood firm in his resolve to create peace and defeat terrorism by engaging in dialogue and cementing the bonds of friendship.”

Justice Krishna Iyer, himself a towering literary figure and former Justice of the Supreme Court of India, has written: “My poetic mood, viewing India and the world and the hidden agendas of those who

control society, is unhappy. At the sunset of life, my brief hour sees the darkling hues in the sky. But when I meet Agnivesh I remember Shakespeare: What a piece of work is a man ! How noble in reason ! How infinite in faculty ! in form in moving, how express and admirable ! in action how like an angel ! in apprehension how like a God !”

Following these great names and the others who have contributed to the volume I am truly humbled. My assessment, indeed tribute, to the Swami is based entirely upon empirical evidence. This is how it should be as I have been trained as an anthropologist. For me facts based on what I see and observe are the basis of my judgement.

As long as Indian society can produce a Swami Agnivesh there will be hope for those who value humanity and compassion and intelligence and wisdom. May I add my humble voice to those who have already paid him the highest compliments. I offer him my salute and also my dua. The salute is for his unflinching humanity. The world needs the



Swami; my dua is to his fellow country men to value him and keep him safe away from the hatred with its knives and pistols.

My plea to those thugs who almost killed the Swami and are perhaps waiting to finish the job: leave him alone. Value him as a guru and guide. You have not spared swamis, Muslims, nor even nuns. This is neither spirituality nor religion, as the Swami teaches us.

That is why I was saddened to hear the news that Swami Agnivesh had just passed away. My prayers go for his noble soul and his grief-stricken family. Great clouds of hatred and violence hang low over the South Asian region and will only be dispersed by love and universal compassion. The world has lost a champion of humanity.

(Akbar Ahmed is the Ibn Khaldun Chair of Islamic Studies, School of International Service, American University, Washington, DC and former High Commissioner from Pakistan to the UK and Ireland)

WHAT I LEARNED FROM SWAMI AGNIVESH

- Valsan Thampu



I deem it my cherished privilege to have been a fellow worker with Swami Agnivesh in the service of humanity. He stands tallest among the religious souls that influenced me, and changed my spiritual outlook. As I pay grateful tributes to Swamiji, I place on record some of the things I learned from him.

First, He taught me that if light is to prevail in this world there must be fire in the minds of human beings. It is our inner fire that becomes the light to the world. That inner fire is nothing but burning love for humanity, which becomes the passion for social justice.

Secondly, I learned from him that it is impossible, in an era religious rot, to love God and religion at the same time. He taught me to love God above religion. To love God is to love fellow human beings; especially those who are poor and oppressed. Swamiji was truly a friend to the poor. He had an instinctive affinity to them. They loved him. In him they found ready help.

Thirdly, he made me aware that religion without reason is dangerous to humanity. Swamiji was quint essentially rational. He believed that God is rational; else God cannot be truth. Maharshi Dayanand's idea of God as the LIGHT OF TRUTH guided Swamiji all through his life. His passion for justice, which made him fight powerful vested interests in diverse sectors, was the political expression of his spirituality. This made smaller people suspect his spirituality.

Fourthly, Swamiji taught me that those who claim to be godly, but do not care to practise godly values like love, truth, justice and compassion, are hypocrites. This made him think poorly of priests in all religions. He saw them as religious parasites. Even so, he loved individual priests who struggled to be true to their calling. He had friends among leaders in all religions. But disenchantment with religion grew

upon him, all the same. At the fag end of his life, he came to believe that human beings need to be liberated from religion, for peace and human welfare to prevail in the world.

Fifthly, he taught me that if one is to grow in character and in stature, one needs to emerge from one's own religious ghetto. Swamiji and I travelled together to different countries as well as different parts of India. I found him universally loved. Man-made labels and identities did not restrict his sense of belonging. Swamiji was truly a world citizen. He lived the Vedic ideal of vasudaiva kutumbakam. To him, people of every race, clime and culture were truly sisters and brothers.

Swami Agnivesh is the best ambassador of Vedic spirituality, though he got branded as a Hinduism baiter. Swamiji believed that Vedic spirituality was the ultimate spiritual treasure of human kind. But he was sad that the Arya Samaj lost its spiritual foundation and became a conformist out fit. He tried till the end to breath fire into the Samaj. In this he did not succeed. He dreamt of people being liberated from religion so that they become free to love God and one another as human beings.

I pay my affectionate respects to the great soul departed from our midst, leaving us a legacy worth cherishing and fulfilling. I believe that he has entered the light of truth and is, very likely, having a healthy debate with Maharshi Dayanand on some of the texts in Sathyarth Prakash with which he did not feel wholly at home.

(Rev. Prof. Valsan Thampu [Former Member, National Commission for Minority Educational Institutions, Govt. of India; Member, National Integration Council and ex-Principal, St. Stephen's College, Delhi])

MODI GOVERNMENT IS MOCKING THE SUFFERING OF THE POOR

-Statement by Swami Agnivesh

New Delhi 16th May, 2020

Prime Minister Modi's dramatic announcement of the largest relief package in our history (misleadingly) totalling Rs. 20 lakh crores raised expectations especially among the poor, who stand in need of urgent relief. But as the details trickle out, hope is beginning to sour into despair.

Barring the offer to provide 5 KG of wheat/rice and 1 KG of Bengal gram per migrant labourer's family for the next two months, there seems to be nothing in this mega package for the poor and the sorely distressed. The least that the central government could have done, and can still do, is to provide free transport to migrant labourers to their homes. This would have averted the tragedy of so many of them perishing while walking hundreds of kilometres to get back home. The government has chosen to turn a blind eye to this vast human tragedy. This will remain a permanent blot on its face.

It was with growing disappointment that I listened to the announcements of the Finance Minister on how the package is going to relieve the distress of farmers, including those in dairy-farming and fisheries. Everything is about infrastructure, which, of course, needs to be developed. But this is not the time to talk about what are essentially long-term policy matters, important as they are. This is the time to mitigate distress; and there is next-to-nothing of that kind in what has been announced. The spirit of today's announcement is similar to a mother's telling her children crying for food that she intends to buy better cooking vessels next year. It mocks human wretchedness and helplessness.

Perhaps the most atrocious thing, which deserves universal condemnation that the government is doing is to abuse the abnormal situation created by the virus to dismantle what little protection that workers enjoyed at least on paper. They are being turned into easy fodder for corporate whales who can swallow them at will. It is immoral for a nation to thrive at the expense of its poor and helpless workers. Even if this helps India to emerge as the greatest economic power in the world, this anti-worker measure is reprehensible and unjustifiable. Such immoral wealth, if wealth is indeed generated in this manner which is doubtful, will make India poorer and undignified even in our eyes.

The terrible thing is that the political class,

especially the opposition, has chosen to be complicit in this atrocity through their studied silence. They could have alleviated the suffering of the poor, especially the tormented migrant labourers at least by offering relief work, as some NGOs have done. Where is the RSS, with its vast army of volunteers who are quick to reach disaster sites, when it secures publicity? No body is seen. The poor have no friend in India. That is a national condemnation.

It is not late even now for Modi to make amends for this terrible betrayal of those who need his attention and help most. The concern for them he professes in his speeches needs to be translated into action. Modi could learn something from his bosom friend, Trump. His administration, together with the Congress, has ensured that US \$ 1500/- month reaches every citizen for the next three months as direct cash transfer. In comparison, the Indian citizen gets nothing, except a slew of speeches. People are suffering. Holding out promises of relief and fooling them with long-term measures is tant amount to deliberate malice.

I appeal to the central government to alleviate the suffering of the poor by transferring to those in the **BPL category Rs. 7500/- per family, per month till normalcy is established.** **Swami Agnivesh Arya Samaj Leader Chairperson—Bandhua Mukti Morcha**

Dear Swami Aryavesh,

On behalf of the Sachar family, I am writing to you to offer our heartfelt condolences on the passing away of our respected Swami Agnivesh ji. My dear father Rajendar Sahar had a very special friendship with Swamiji and they were always together in raising their voice against any violation of human rights and worked very hard in improving the lives of the poor and needy people. I personally was very fortunate to have met with Swamiji number of times and just couple of months back I had a very enriching conversation with him, when he very kind gave his endorsement comments on my fathers forthcoming autobiography.

We will miss the positive energy and warm kindness of Swamiji and his inspirational drive to protect the rights of the under privileged sections of our society.

sanjivsachar57@gmail.com
agnivesh70@gmail.com

Warm Regards,
Sanjiv Sachar

12th September 2020 PRESS RELEASE

The demise of Swami Agnivesh is a loss that the Indian diaspora has felt not only personally, but also politically. Besides the thousands of lives that he touched directly, the ideas that he stood for gained him traction far beyond what physical boundaries would permit.

An independent and rational thinker, he strongly believed that spirituality should not translate into an exercise of escapism, for belief, faith and action cannot, and should not be compartmentalized. For him, spirituality was to be used as a tool to achieve social transformation, and to achieve that, the obscurantist, ritual-ridden, superstition-mongering religion needed to be given a prompt burial. He preached, but he preached only what he practiced. He did not shy away from expressing his strong opinions, and was openly critical of cultural imperialism, consumerism and the ironies of religion in our country. From participating in the International Peace Protest for Palestine in 2012, to being elected thrice as the Chairperson of the UN Trust Fund on Contemporary Forms of Slavery, he was passionately vocal, and unapologetically so. He was unsparing of his critique of the 'bankruptcy of the political leadership of India', and was far from taking the convenient path of being 'a political'. From being a part of Jaiprakash Narayan's 'Total Revolution', to being jailed for his sharp critiques against the imposition of Emergency in 1975, he stood true to his principles until his last breath.

At a time when we are seeing gagging of dissenting voices, many of us continued to find strength from this man, who had gone to the extent of demanding a judicial enquiry against the government he himself was a part of. He never regretted resigning from his political office as the Education Minister in Bhajan Lal's cabinet in the Haryana Legislative Assembly-for him, his loyalty to the working class surpassed these conventionalities, so how could he be silent when 10 workers were murdered in a police firing in Faridabad's industrial township?

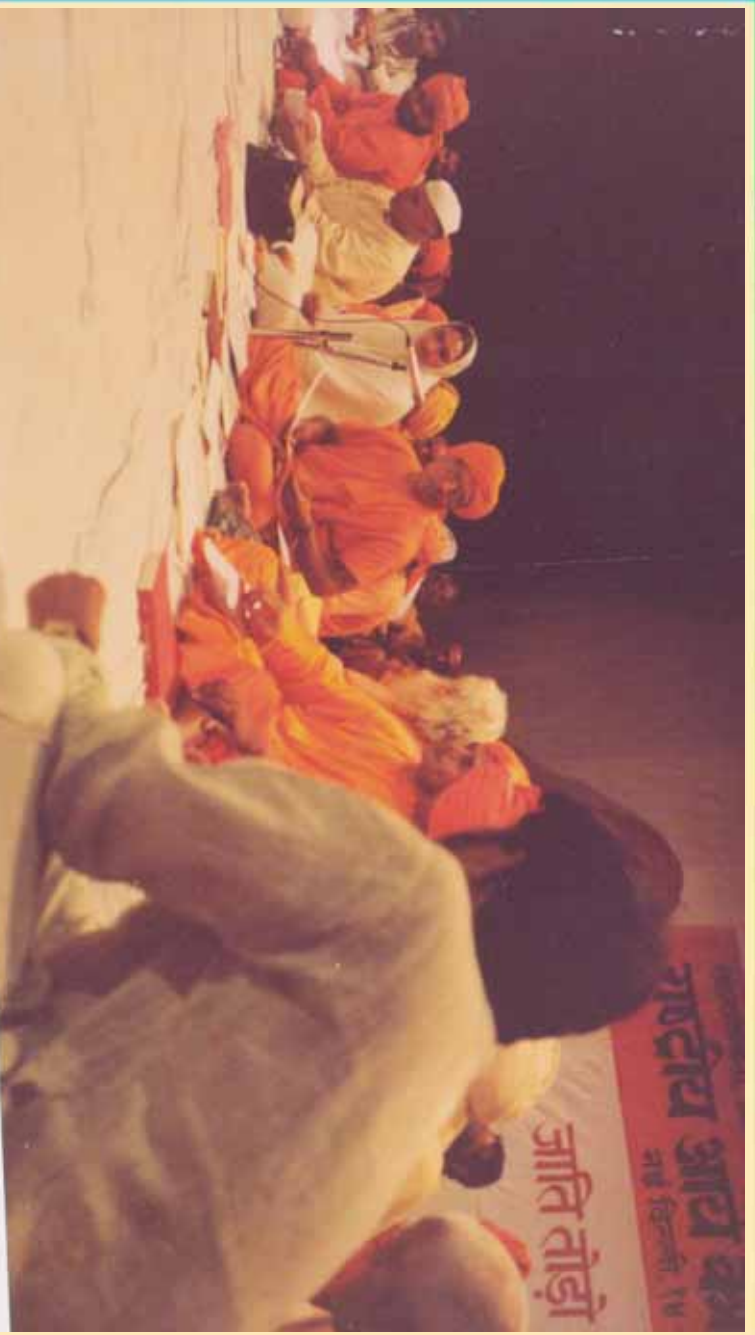
Swami Agnivesh's most poignant journey however, has been with his endeavour to eradicate bonded and forced labour in India, and to ensure a dignified life for the working class. With this mission, he founded the Bandhua Mukti Morcha (Bonded Labour Liberation Front) in 1981, an organization which is known for its tireless work to identify and rescue bonded labour. He spent years wandering from Government Offices to police stations, trying to convince courts and Commissioners of the reality of bonded labourers which

had been systematically invisibilized. It is because of his efforts that India enacted a law that is far more progressive than its counter part nations-one that acknowledges non-payment of wages as slavery. Till date, Bandhua Mukti Morcha has rescued over 1,80,000 individuals who were working in bondage, out of which 26,000 have been children.

All his life, Swami Agnivesh fought against communalism and intolerance in the name of religion. In 1989, he led a multi-religious march from Delhi to Meerut to protest against and defuse communal violence that had claimed the lives of 45 Muslim youths. In 1999, concerned about escalating religious fundamentalism and obscurantism, he helped launch a multi-religious forum called Religions for Social Justice, which led a group of 55 religious leaders to the place where the Australian Christian missionary Graham Steines and his two sons were burned to death in their sleep by a group of right wing Hindu bigots.

In the wake of Gujarat riots of 2002, Swami Agnivesh organized a group of 72 eminent religious and social leaders who spent five days in the violence-affected areas of Gujarat and denounced the Hindu fundamentalist organizations and sectors responsible for the massacre. He was actively involved in Sarva Dharma Sansad (Parliament of Religions), which aimed to create an atmosphere of cross-faith dialogue, harmony, and understanding in India based on a Common Minimum Program of Social Action. Time and again, he raised his voice against the stereo typing of the association of Islam with terrorism.

Swami Agnivesh was staunchly critical of casteism, and led widely covered movement to secure the traditionally banned entry of the bahnjan community into Nathdwara temple in Rajasthan. He organized a 18 day long march on foot from Red Fort in Delhi, to Deorala in Rajasthan, in which 180 sanyasis had participated to show their opposition to the glorification of the murderous practice called sati. This march played a critical role in bringing about the 1987 Sati Prevention Act, with its impact being so strong that the then Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi as forced to summon the Parliament and pass the Act. His national campaign against female foeticide was a historical moment in bringing about this issue to the fore front. He was cognizant of the structural vulnerability that casteism and gender played in all aspects of life, and was thus a strong proponent of putting the last person



first' in every action. As Dr. Mannohan Singh has aptly said, "There is no endeavour to enlarge social justice within the country and in the wider world in which Swami Agnivesh is not in the forefront..."

"Swami Agnivesh was far beyond the times that we are in, and was a striking paradox to see a figure in saffron stand strongly against the ills of Hindutva. From travelling to Kashmir at the peak of trouble in 2008 to counsel peace and dialogue, to mediating between feuding Sikh groups of Dera Sachcha Sauda and Akal Takht, to being appointed as the mediator to foster dialogue between the government and Maoist leadership, he was unstoppable in his efforts to harbour peace. Swami Agnivesh was the recipient of the Right to Livelihood Award (2004) and Rajiv Gandhi Sadbhavna Puraskar (2004), amongst many other honours bestowed upon him. Swami Agnivesh left his bodily abode at 6:45 p.m. on 11th September 2020, ten days before he was to turn 81. He breathed his last in the IBL Hospital, Vasant Kunj, Delhi. He could never recover from the lynching attack that the right wing had launched on him in 2018 in Jharkhand, when he was participating in a public meeting for the rights of the adivasi community. Swami Agnivesh ignited hundreds of lives with his revolutionary thoughts. The following people paid their tributes to him:-

Harsh Mander, writer and activist.

Yogendra Yadav, scholar and politician.

Anil JT Couto, Archbishop of Delhi and Chairman, Commission for Migrants.

Paramjeet Singh Chandokh,

Delhi Gurudwara Prabandh Committee.

Ali Merchant, Bahai leader. Isaac Malekar, Rabbi and Honorary Secretary of the Jewish Welfare Association.

Goswami Sushil Maharaj, Sarva Dharma Sansad.

Prof. Salim Engineer, Vice President of Jamaat-e-Islami hind.

Chaudhary Birendra Singh, ex Cabinet Minister.

Sudhira Sham, follower from South Africa.

Ram Singh, Joint Secretary of World Council of Arya Samaj.

Swami Yatishwaranand, MLA from Haridwar.

Choudary Ajeet Singh, ex MLA, Haryana.

Acharya Ved Prakash, International Preacher.

D. Raja, General Secretary of CPI-M.

R. Venkataraman, son of Ex-President

Swami Agnivesh's last rites were performed by Swami Aryavesh, his successor and the President of World Council of Arya Samaj, at his Agniyoga Aashram in Behlpa, Gurugram, at 4-00 p.m. on 12th September 2020. His last rites were attended by Dr. Ved Pratap Vedic, Naresh Yadav (Ex. MLA), Kavita Srivastava (General Secretary, PUCL) and Swami Samarpanand, amongst many others.

Bandhua Mukti Morcha and World Council of Arya Samaj hopes to take Swami ji's vision and mission a head, and do justice to his ideas.

Swami Aryavesh *Working President Bandhua Mukti Morcha and World Council of Arya Samaj*

Professor Vithal Rao *General Secretary World Council of Arya Samaj.*

स्वामी आर्यविश जी एवं प्रोफेसर विह्वल राव आर्य जी



दिल्ली से बाहर होने के कारण स्वामी जी के श्रद्धांजलि सभा में प्रस्तुत करने के लिए अयोध्यास्थाश्रमी विश्वात्मा भरत गांधी का लिखित संदेश

दिनांक १९ सितम्बर, २०२० की शाम को अचानक स्वामी अग्निवेश जी के हम लोगों के बीच से चले जाने की खबर सुनकर हमें तथा विश्व परिवर्तन मिशन और उससे जुड़े सभी संगठनों के सभी कार्यकर्ताओं को गहरा सदमा पहुँचा।

स्वामी जी जब से अस्पताल में इलाज के लिए, भर्ती हुए थे, हम सभी लोग यह दुःख कर रहे थे कि स्वामी जी बीमारी को हराकर जल्द से जल्द हम लोगों के बीच आएँगे। १९ सितम्बर को बीमारी ने हम लोगों से स्वामी जी को छीन लिया।

मेरी एवं स्वामी जी के साथ देश की वर्तमान समस्याओं पर कई बैठकें हुईं। हम लोगों ने यह समझने की कोशिश किया कि किस तरह देश की समस्याओं के समाधान हेतु पार्टियों व सामाजिक संगठनों की एकता को मजबूत किया जाए और लिखित सविधान पर आधारित एक साझा मंच बनाया जाये।

इस दृष्टिकोण से संगठनों के साझा मंच का एक सविधान तैयार किया गया जिस पर स्वामी जी के साथ गंभीर मंचन हुआ। वोर्ट्स पार्टी इंटरनेशनल के कई कार्यकर्ताओं ने गत दिनों स्वामी जी के गरुश्राम आश्रम के चिंतन शिविर में हिस्सा लिया।

स्वामी जी मुखर होकर पूरे देश में लोगों को जागरूक करने की जो मुहिम छेड़ रखी थी इससे बौखला कर धार्मिक अंधविश्वास में विश्वास करने वाली ताकतों ने रवागी जी पर कई बार जानलेवा हमला भी किया, जिसकी पूरे देश भर में निंदा की गई।

धार्मिक कट्टरता के नशे में चूर कुछ सिस्फिरों के हमले के बाद स्वामी जी का स्वास्थ्य लगातार बिगड़ता गया और अंत में इन ताकतों के मनसूबे कामयाब हो गए।

विश्व परिवर्तन मिशन और इससे जुड़े सभी संगठनों एवं स्वामी अग्निवेश जी का मिशन विश्व सरकार की स्थापना करना रहा है। एक्सेवरवाद के सिद्धांत की जिस तरह की राजनीतिक व्याख्या करके स्वामी जी ने विश्व सरकार के गठन का निष्कर्ष स्वामी जी ने निकाला, वह अद्भुत था और उसे इतिहास याद करेगा। क्योंकि आज ज्यादातर सामाजिक आर्थिक और राजनीतिक समस्याएं विश्वस्तरीय हैं, ग्लोबल है, जिराका रागाधान केवल विश्व सरकार ही कर सकती है। स्वामी जी ने आलोचनाओं की परवाह किए बिना अपनी राह से भटकते हुए आर्य समाज की बागडोर को कसकर जीवन भर पकड़े रखा आर्य समाज को सच्चे रास्ते पर ले जाने की जीवन भर कोशिश की।

बंधुआ मजदूरों की तरफ कोई भी राजनीतिक पार्टी देखती भी नहीं, क्योंकि इनसे न तो वोट मिलती है ना तो पार्टी के लिए वंदा। रवागी जी पूरी जिंदगी निःस्वार्थ भाव से गरीबों वह मजदूरों, खासतौर पर इन बंधुआ मजदूरों के पुनर्वास के लिए तन मन धन से काम किया।

आज जब देश में धार्मिक कट्टरता का खतरा और तेजी से बढ़ रहा है और आर्य समाज के कुछ भटकते हुए लोग पतनस्पर्धा के रास्ते पर चल रहे हैं, ऐसे में स्वामी जी का रास्ता ही आर्य समाज के मान मर्यादा को भविष्य में बचा सकेगा।

मैं विश्व परिवर्तन मिशन की ओर से और इससे जुड़े सभी संगठनों की ओर से तथा इससे जुड़े सभी राजनीतिक पार्टियों की ओर से स्वामी जी को श्रद्धांजलि अर्पित करता हूँ। मैं यह मानता हूँ कि स्वामी जी के प्रति सच्ची श्रद्धांजलि यही होगी कि देश और दुनिया भर में न्यायप्रिय और मानवावादी ताकतों की लामबंदी की जाए, जिससे एक न्यायप्रिय विश्व व्यवस्था का निर्माण किया जा सके। जिसके लिए स्वामी जी जीवन पर्वत संघर्ष करते रहे। इस दिशा में कोई भी निर्णय होगा तो मैं तन मन धन से इसके साथ रहूंगा।

-विश्वात्मा भरत गांधी

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HINDU RELIGIOUS LEADERS WHO TOOK A BRAVE STAND AGAINST HINDUTVA

16th September, 2020

-Sunita Viswanath

Swamiji was the living embodiment of the progressive Hinduism that I embrace. His life and being validated my path.



I first met Swami Agnivesh three years ago at his office in Delhi. I bent to touch his feet out of respect, but he stopped me, saying we were equals. I told him about my work to build a progressive Hindu platform which would mobilize Hindus to stand by the inclusive and peaceful teachings of our scriptures and reject Hindu nationalism.

He listened attentively and asked me why I wanted to do this as a Hindu and said these labels were limiting and I should work as a compassionate human being for all of humanity. I explained that I had been working as a secular person all my life, but that I was very worried about the lack of response from faithful Hindus to Hindutva. Hindus had to take back our faith as well as our democracy from those who were driven by hate. Swamiji was a renunciant of everything including the label “Hindu,” but he blessed my chosen path, and we stayed in touch, often speaking on WhatsApp about political matters in both India and the United States.

I next met Swamiji in Toronto, Canada, in November 2018. Swamiji was invited by the Parliament of World Religions to be a plenary speaker and we also asked him to speak on Sadhana’s panel on progressive Hinduism at the same conference. Swamiji came with another wonderful young Swami from South Africa, Swami Vedananda, whom he was grooming and mentoring to carry on his work.

Swami Agnivesh, foreground left, with (clockwise) Sunita Viswanath, Swami Vedananda, Gautham Reddy and Nikhil Mandalaparthi of Sadhana, at the

Parliament of World Religions, Toronto, November 2018.

As soon as I and my Sadhana colleagues Gautham Reddy and Nikhil Mandalaparthi arrived in Toronto, board members of the Parliament told us that they had received masses of hate mails regarding Swamiji speaking, all from Hindus who considered him an anti-Hindu. Some of these messages were violent and threatening. Gautham, Nikhil and I were among those who stayed close to Swamiji at all times, but we were amazed by the way Swamiji just went about his business without any fear or worry.

He was just speaking his truth and didn’t care at all about these threats. The Parliament had to hire extra security at every event where Swamiji spoke, and when he spoke at the plenary, they had placed police at every exit and behind the stage. Swamiji didn’t seem to even notice all this. His only concern was to spread the message of love and justice to all who were gathered.

In the last two years, Hindutva mobs beat him up twice and very badly. He spent a lot of time in hospital and when I was with him last winter, he told me that his last illness was at least partly caused by the injuries he suffered from these beatings.

I was especially struck by the love that the Sikh community had for Swamiji. Once it was known that Swamiji was in danger, the Sikh community members at the Parliament organized themselves so that there were always a large group of Sikhs going around with Swamiji, ensuring his safety. This was because during the pogroms against the Sikhs in 1984, Swamiji was vocal in his outrage and walked through the dangerous areas himself and gave protection to many Sikh families, and saved many lives. This will never be forgotten by the Sikhs in India. And when the Sikhs at the Parliament organized a prayer vigil for those who perished in 1984, Swamiji was their guest of honor.

I had helped Swamiji write his plenary speech, typing as he dictated. I had printed the speech myself, in large font, and made sure the papers were in his hands as he went to the stage. I was sitting in the front row feeling very nervous because some of the hate mail had said they would storm the stage if he was allowed to speak. As Swamiji began his speech, he looked straight at me with a twinkle in his eye, and uttered words that I knew were not in the typed speech, "As a very proud and progressive Hindu, I go by what the Vedas proclaim...", and he went on to deliver the fiery speech I had helped him with. This was a gesture of pure love, and I will never forget it.

I was fortunate enough to take Swami Agnivesh and Swami Vedanada to see the Niagara Falls; to travel with them to Washington, D.C., to meet government officials and advocates to discuss the state of democracy and human rights in India; and to host them in my home in New York. On the two trips I made to India since then, I stayed with Swamiji in Delhi. And on both trips Swamiji organized gatherings so that I could speak with concerned Indian activists about the need to mobilize Hindus of conscience to reject Hindu Nationalism. My colleague in Hindus for Human Rights, Giri, stayed with Swamiji for many months, and helped launch his "Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam" movement. If only Swamiji had lived long enough to build his mass movement of love and compassion.

The need of our dark hour is for people of faith to take back their religions from the clutches of extremists. We need progressive Jews to stand up for the rights and self-determination of the Palestinian people; Buddhists to denounce the atrocities against Rohingya in Myanmar; and Muslims to denounce extremist groups like the Taliban. Similarly, we need Hindus to stand up against the Islamophobic and fascistic ideology of Hindutva—and Swamiji was one of the only Hindu religious leaders who took a clear and brave stand. It is one of the blessings of my life that I knew and was close to a revolutionary religious leader like Swami Agnivesh.

The Insincerity of Indian Americans' Solidarity With the Black Lives Matter Movement

I spoke to Swami Vedananda on the morning of September 11th, in the moments after I heard the

news of Swamiji's demise. Swami Vedananda told me that the last words Swamiji had spoken to him were, "You must carry on my work." And I hope to work closely with Swami Vedananda and any Hindu who is willing to live by the principles of love and justice for all, Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, and build the world that Swamiji worked for all his life.

Swamiji was the living embodiment of the progressive Hinduism that I embrace. His life and being validated my path. He lived by the Vedas and stood for complete equality and equal rights regardless of sex, gender, age, race, religion, caste and sexual orientation. He devoted his entire life to the struggle for human rights of the most disadvantaged in India: Dalits and other minorities, and those who are suffering in the bonded labor system.

Swamiji may have been 80 years old, but he had the youthful mind and energy of a young man. This even though his work was so controversial and provocative that he was arrested and beaten up many times over the course of his career. In the last two years, Hindutva mobs beat him up twice and very badly. He spent a lot of time in hospital and when I was with him last winter, he told me that his last illness was at least partly caused by the injuries he suffered from these beatings.

While I can look back in history and find many social reformers and revolutionaries who were motivated by their Hindu faith, in these dark times as a progressive Hindu who is horrified by the clampdown on human rights, freedom of expression and freedom of religion in India, the all-too-frequent lynchings, rapes, unfair arrests and murders taking place, I only see one prominent Hindu standing up loud and clear, and putting their life on the line for justice, and that is Swami Agnivesh. I am shattered that Swamiji is no longer with us.

(Sunita Viswanath is the co-founder of Hindus for Human Rights, one of the 5 organizations behind the upcoming Reclaiming India@73 virtual conference on October 3rd and 4th, 2020. Headliners include Prof. Rajmohan Gandhi, Dr. Ramchandra Guha, Rev. Dr. William Barber, former Vice President of India Hamid Ansari, journalist Afza Khanum Sherwani and prominent Indian lawyers Prashant Bhusan and Indira Jaising, and many more. For details, visit: www.reclaimingindia.com Sign up to our Newsletter)

VEDIC SOCIALISM

At the very outset let me state the conceptual difficulty in describing what is meant by 'religion' and what is meant by 'social liberation'. A common, woman is point of view about religion is highly compartmentalised. Religion is either Hinduism or Christianity or Islam or Buddhism or Sikhism or Jainism, depending mostly on the circumstances in which she was born and brought up. The same is with the word 'social liberation' which has come to be associated with marxism or socialist revolution.

This conceptualisation, thought relevant in many ways, suffers from a fanatic and a dogmatic vision. Therefore, it would be worth while first to put these two words in their proper perspective and then attempt a search for an Indian perspective.

The greatest tragedy of our times is that the perceptions and traditions of religion have come to rely heavily on the form, the outer shell rather than on the essence or spirit of religion while all religions have as their essence truth, love, compassion, justice etcetera, and by the same logic they are all committed to fight against the forces of untruth, bondage, injustice and such like, yet to do with their real spiritual aspect of religion and are instead obsessed with the exterior forms of rituals and dogmas, just other's and so on. It is precisely this obsession with the form as opposed to the content, that has given rise to Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity and Islam. The obsession is more often than not carried to the extent of outright perversions and distortions where instead of fighting against the forces of untruth and justice, some of these religions glorify themselves to fighting against each other and worse, fighting between the several sub-religions within each one of them. The more a religion gets formalised, institutionalists and hierarchically structured, the more it gets alienated from its own original spirit of struggle against oppression and domination. Rather, they tend to dominate, as also oppress their own people followers. The exploiting class readily seizes this powerful instrument of religion to perpetuate their exploitation. Thus, the religion instead of being an instrument of change, degenerates into an instrument of status quo.

Religion has two faces, each playing a diametrically opposite role. In its pristine, pure and formative stage it played a historical and revolutionary role in the development of society and human beings. Is it not a fact that religion, in all its manifestations and denominations, helped woman and the group in which and lived to come out of the quagmire of anarchy, lawlessness and immorality, and

-Swami Agnivesh
infused her with social cohesiveness and other disciplines ? All great women of the past, or the great seers of the vedic times or in the persons of Laoze or confucius of China or Manu from India or Thiruvalluvar of South India have in one way or the other contributed to extricating human beings out of the pit of darkness anarchy and disorder and invested them with a social consciousness and discipline which in turn helped them to shape into better ones beings. For this reason these early religious teachers have been rightly called the lawgivers, people who far from offering mental opium to the common people roused them from their long stupor and state of downright immorality, fear and lasciviousness, into spiritual wakefulness, making them respond in a more positive way to higher values of life.

This evidently was a revolutionary role of great importance and there should be no hesitation in recognising the fact that every religion in its formative state constituted in powerful revolutionary movement for social liberation and against blind faith, superstition and other evil practice. There is not denying the fact that several marxist the oreticians have recognised this revolutionary role of religion in ample measure.

But the other face of religion is, to say the least, abhorrent-the face of an organised and institutionalised hierarchical religion. In this sense, religion becomes part and parcel of the social system itself. This is but natural. However, the dominant exploiting class or classes have used these attributes of organised religion to add grist to their self seeking and partisan ends. As a result, religion which arose out of the spiritual necessities of the people and during its formative stage, espoused the cause of social liberation and human values growing from it, felt on bad days and become the hand maid of exploiting and oppressor classes.

One cannot sleep ever the serious shortcomings of religion. It is surprising indeed that despite the number of claimants to spirituality being exceedingly large, religion has not cared to explore as to why the world continues to be steeped in darkness why two thirds of the population the world over is compelled to lend a life of starvation and penury; why despite an abundance of gods, ropets, sidhpurusha, yogis and god knows how many human-gods, murder, dacoity, pilfery, adultery, smuggling, small and major wars have become the order of the day ? Claimants to spirituality and religion are not prepared even to face this much less solve the problems. They talk of their deep spiritual experiences but are impervious to the naked reality that stares them

in the face. They refuse to understand that for the miseries and troubles of today, not god nor any divine dispensation but the contemporary social system is primarily responsible.

Precisely to escape this responsibility the exploiter and the ruling classes have completely perverted the powerful karma theory and made the toiling and suffering masses believe that for all their miseries and sorrows the karma or deeds of their own past lives are responsible. Such a fate or taquadeer is something ordained by the all powerful God and cannot be changed by any mortal. The karma philosophy in fact is just the opposite. It places human endeavour above divine dispensation and says that even God cannot deny human beings the fruits of their actions. The karma exhortation in essence, is for action for liberation with the assured results of social change. But like many such good things this philocopy also fell prey to distortions and perversions. To demolish the pernicious philosophy attributed to this theory, lock, steck and barrel, is the duty of every rational being. When maxism directs its fire against this crippling theory, it verily does a commendable job.

The central point of marxist opposition or criticism is that philosophically religion is unscientific. The latter half of the 19th century. When Karl Marx propounded his doctrine, was certainly a period of ascendancy of materialist philosophy which taught that physical reality is governed by the laws of nature; only that is scientific or cognisable which full within the realm of causality, and things speculative have no place in cognition and are mythical. Marxists' charge against religion is also directed against the vested interests which have used it in pursuit of their narrow selfish ends. Mysticism has been used it in pursuit of their narrow selfish ends. Mysticism has been used to spread among the oppressed and the exploited masses such poisonous woods as blind faith, superstition, and absolute reliance on fate, in an attempt to blunt their urge for struggle and to consolidate the hold of the exploiting classes on society. The administrator, the feudalist and the capitalist have, so to say, joined in an unholy combination and antisocial collaboration with the priestly and ecclesiastical class to carry out this evil task.

Isn't there then some sense in this charge of the marxists? Indeed there is, but this is only one side. As a matter of fact that we see today are so many distortions of religion and its wrong practices. We should not close our eyes to the fact that there was some inbuilt strength, force and quality in religion which made that band of faithful but rebellious teachers and saints, openly oppose and resist these distortions and evil practices which out at the very root of true religion, and the sufferings and privations they

underwent to uphold their noble cause. Some of them were mounted on gallows, others were tremped under the feet of elephants, while still others were poisoned to death.

These men and women of deep faith to religion and time honoured values of their life were not only revolutionary thinkers but also spiritualists and mystics of a high order. Thus it is absurd to accept that religion, spiritualism and mysticism were only the instruments of oppression used by the exploiting classes against the oppressed and exploited majority. The fact is that the latter have equally used them as instruments of struggle and rebellion against the forces of evil represented by exploiters and the dominant classes.

The Marxist negation of religion, as facts show has been carried at the point of overshooting the target. In their zeal to direct their guns against its distortions and inequities they have unwittingly made assaults on religion in its entirety and mounted an under served attack on spiritualism and what it stands for.

This seeming contradiction between religion and marxism or religion and social liberation must be overcome soon. By opposing religion on its entirely and launching attacks on it right and left and not an blind faith, superstition and retualism as distinct from the essence of religion, marxists are not doing any great service to humanity. In fact they are only bringing their own revolutionary doctrines into disrepute and making them look suspect in the eyes of the faithful. To open up possibilities of a real revolutionary advance in society, bridges of understanding and cooperation have to be built between marxism and religion, between spiritualism and revolution and bothe their potentials need to be properly assessed.

The tie up between organised religion and exploiting classes has evidently prevented the former from looking at marxism or any progressive philosophy of social liberation and human emancipation with a detached nonpartisan eye. The selfstyled custodians of religion never reconciled themselves to recognising marxism as a system of values committed to free and emancipate society from exploitation from hunger and poverty and from moral degradation, the hallmark of all class societies. To those when are truly religious and wedded to the ideal of uplift in human beings from their present state of decadence and soul killing existence, this is a massive challenge. These men and women of goodwill and character, faith and wisdom will have to think deeply and discover ties of affinity between religion and marxism. For, they knew full well that religion is not a monopoly of the ruling classes and that any philosophy or outlook steeped in humanism and love for the common people, though atheistic in conception, cannot be anti eligion. Though based on human compassion. Buddhism and Jainism too are

atheistic, yet no body calls them anti religion.

The great law giver Manu called the scriptures and cited perseverance, forbearance and self restraint etc. as part of the ten cardinal principles of 'dharma' but did not mention God or faith in any divinity as sine-qua-non of dharma. Similarly the Rishi Kanand in his Material and spiritual development constitutes dharma. The indomitable author of the epic MAHABHARATA, Maharshi Vyas, summed up the tenets of religion and asked people to hear the summum bonum of religion and having heard, imbibe it. Do not do unto other what you would not have others do unto you is what he said.

These and many other authorities are there to show that faith in God or on any of her messengers is not control to spiritual practice. Then why this differential attitude towards marxism which avowedly does not believe in God ? The fact of the matter is that marxism arise out of these parenial human passions and ideal which precisely are a characteristic feature of religion. If this is so, then why a refusal on the part of religion to perceive and recognise religious temper and humanism behind marxism ?

It is evident that, like marxism, religion taught came to be over shadowed by a number of distortions and vulgarities. Not that these aberrations and distortions are fortuitous or that they arose out of a vacuum. Nothing of the sort. As a matter of fact these arise because the exploiting class deliberately and systematically injected them into religion seems to prevent any human advance towards a mere rational reordering or restructuring of society. They did so because any social system based on fair play and justice would have deprived them if their supremacy and pound of flesh that they appropriated from an unjust society. Surprisingly, the exploiting classes take over under religion only to oppose religion, reasons which induce them to follow a course at variance with true religion proper them to oppose marxism and revolution.

The conflict between marxism and religion is the end product of the machinations of the exploiting classes and intellectuals serving them who in the name of religion oppose revolution and revolutionary transformation of the society. For those who are wode awake and think of the common women, the conspirac of the exploiters must be confronted nad overcome without any loss of time. Frecing themselves of all prejudices they should prasp and demonstrate that a true of all prejudices they should grasp and demonstrate that a true religion and a true revolutionary spirit are not mutually hostile but complementary and that the two are harmonious and compatible with each other. Only by highlighting this harmony and mutal compatibility can we overcome the

conflict between religion and social liberation which these exploiting classes have profitably used in pursuit of their selfish partisan ends.

In itself this is not an easy task, but it demands on effort to strip off the mask worn by the self styled leaders of religion and their camp followers. That really makes it an uphill task.

Having made this humble attempt to lay down the brand parameters and the broadest possible perspective, we shall now look for inputs and insights contained in the VEDAS and in vedic thought as propounded by seers, sages and social activists. It would be impertinent not to mention that the inspiration to undertake such an exercise came to me from the great revolutionary sanyasi **Swami Dayanand** (1823-1883). A contemporary of Karl Marx, Dayanand's epechal contributions unfortunately have not yet been sufficiently recognised at a national and international level.

The changed perspective of vedic thought as enunciated by Dayanand is two dimensional. It is at the level of both VYASHTI, the individual and SAMASHTI, the social. In short, for the change to be effective it has to be a two pronged process; change the individual from within and the society from without, while the first involves spiritual training and discipline called ASHTAND YOGA, eitht steps towards the establishment of a society based on the principles of VARNA ASHRAM.

Before enlarging on these two dimensions of individual and societal change, let me make a very brief appraisal of the basic fundamentals that will guide us through this approach. The fundamentals of vedic thought may be summed up as the doctrine of trinity, the eternal elements or entittes that go to make this creation, this universe. The first is matter or profiti, with its inherent attribute of sat or existence, the second is the soul or atma with its inherent attributes of sat and chit, existence and consciousness and the third is the God or paramatma with its inherent attributes of sat, chit and anand; satchidanand, existence, consciousness and bliss.

God, The Almighty with Her attributes as emnipotent, omni present and omniscient, formless, just, kind and loving embediment of truth and compassion, alone is the creator and worthy of our worship. God creates the universe but not the basic matter or the soul to help mortals attain the third attribute of anand or bliss, so conspicuously lacking in the soul.

This analysis helps us to understand the reason d'e'tre of this creation and is confirms that this life and this universe is only a means to a certain end, blissful emancipation, mokhsanand not an end itself. Elaboration of this discussion on the fundamentals I

leave for same other time. Coming back to the resources for individual and social change in the Vedas, I will dwell in brief on the farmer and at length on the latter.

Spiritual pursuit of the vedic path starts with the premise that the ultimate object of our life and existence is to seek Her, be with Her and in a limited sense, merge into Her, absolute meger of soul into God is impossible because the two are two different entities. This premises makes it abundantly clear that each soul must wries for its soul itself. Others can at best help in finging the right path but cannot substitute for individual spiritual pursuits. To be more precise, each individual soul will have to bear his or her own cross. Hence, the absolute need for direct communion between the soul and the God. Since God is all pervasive, including the soul, there is only one possible meeting point, the soul within.

Since God is fermless, any worship of any for in the name of God will be self defeating. The invention of incarnations, avatera, idols and such like are proper substitutes of the farmless. As a matter of fact, the most essential aspect of God's worship is to plunge into a formless void, deep into a sen of silence, into nothingness, into thought lessness. Anything to do with our sence of vision or sound or taste taste or touch or smell will lead us astray. The moment the soul emptics itself of all its sence pereption, God emerges as an indescribable experience, the soul transcending into a reuln of peace, absolute peace. A scientific method of meditation helps one in prelenging this experience from a fraction of a second to hours.

The obvious question here would be, are our temples of God and our forms and our method of worship just the opposite ? And, if so are we not getting more and more removed from the true path of worship ? I leave that for you to pander ever and shall address myself to a more difficult question. How to have that experience ? An anyone at anytime get it ? Is it not easier said them done ? What exactly is the preparation for such an experience ?

It is here that Vedas lend us to the second aspect of change perspective, the societal. In order to experience that inner hey and peace, a soul has to clear itself of all accumulated sanskara, the sanskara of passion and greed and anger and fear and so on. In order to replace these with sublime lave, compassion, truth and an urge for justice one has to launch a struggle from within and with ug. It is unthinkable to attain truth within, with out simultaneously fighting the farees of untruth outside. Therefore, the fight against untruth, bandage, an unjust social order based on violence and greed and usurpation became part and pareel of one's spiritual pursuit, while looking for God's beatitude in

every particle of Her creation, one has als to devote one's energies in removing the ugly spots which we in our ignorance have inflicted on this otherwise beautiful world.

Darwinion concepts of survival of the fittest and conquest of nature will have to be given a go by and a more wholistic approach has to be adopted where the weakest cannot only survie but live with happiness, where nature is not only nurtured and preserved but an abiding friendship with tress and flowers, mountains and rivers and animals and birds is fastered. Keynesian economics based on greed and multiplicity of wants becomes incompatible with a spiritual economics of voluntary poverty and small is beautiful. The Vedas visualised this world of ours as the universal family, **VASUDHAIV KUTUMBAKAM**, and enjoying on us to regulate our economic affairs in the best tradition of a family; From each according to one's capacity to each according to one's need, the man made arms race and the dangers of total annihilation does not haunt ayurvedic world where everyone looks at all creatures as one's friends, **MITRASYA CHAKSHUSHA SAMIKSHA MAHE (Yaj. 36.18)**

Vegetarianism and non alcholism are part of the vedic way of life. In short, plain simple living and high thinking becomes the norm and with God as the guiding star, an individual's march towards his or her own liberation or moksha gets in extricably woven into the liberation struggle of the society.

We now come to the concrete manifestation of a liberation struggle in society. The Vedas do not depend on each individual's goodness for the creation of a just, truthful, nonviolent society. They emphasise the need of or structural changes and a perpetual class struggle to stamp out the evil of accumulation and inequity.

The cardinal principles of a vedic society are :

NO BIRTH RIGHT : No individual can claim any special right or privilege in society because of his or her birth in a certain family. Right of inheritance, of means of production and distribution, is thereof are ruled out. Similarly caste distinctions based on birth are an anathema to the vedic social order, Yajurveda 40th chapter.

VARNA ASHRAM : the society will regulate an individual's throught four varnas, the chosen path of a mission and four ashrams or a division of life into stages leading the sublimation of an individual self into the universal family. The entire education system is geared to the task of producing missionaries as opposed to mercenaries. Every child has to choose one of the three mission; mission to right against forces of ignorance aijan (brahman); mission to fight against forces of injustice, anyaya (kshatriya); or the mission to fight against the forces of inadequacy, abhaya (vaishya). Only a person failing to qualify for any of these missions is

designated Shudra and is called upon to serve one of these like an apprentice. Here is nothing mental or derogatory in the word shudra. In fact the vedic injunction is JANMANA JAYATE SHUDRA KARMANA DWIJA UCHYATE or by birth every one is born a shudra. It is only through action that he or she qualifies for twice born. It is only after qualifying for a certain discipline that one becomes a brahmin etc.

Even this classification is not rigid. Promotion to higher varna as an incentive and demerit. I was varna as punishment keeps the society in ferment. Thus, we see that varna means to choose a mission and has nothing to do with colour or caste or racial superiority.

A similar four part division of life into four ashramas is enjoined. The first approximately twenty five years as brahmacharya ashram, or education and discipline; the second up to fifty years of age approximately as grihastha ashram, married and family life; the third is vanaprastha ashram or social work; the fourth is sanyasa ashram. or a classed social activist. a moving flame devoted to God and her creation only. The only thing common in all these stages is ashram. Ashram means labour and ashram means brimful of labour. (for Varnashram please refer to Purush Sukt of Yajurveda 31st Chapter-1)

The net effort of this varnashram system is the negation of the institution of private property. Private ownership of means of production and distribution is the impatible with the vedic varnashram socio-economic system. A person is entitled to a status based on his or her action, talent and aptitude. Guna, Karma and Swabhava. Instead of private ownership, the vedas prescribe a collective form of living and sharing. The Sangathan Sukt of Regveda, the last chapter, calls upon people to deliberate collectively and to own means of food, water and employment collectively.

The vedas propounded injunction against private ownership and this to me is very important. The social system cannot depend on an individual's sense of charity and piety. It has to be so structured that equality of opportunity and common ownership of means of production and distribution become hallmarks of an egalitarian society.

But that does not and the possibility of exploitation. The slight at complacency might land people in exploitative structures and relationships of domination. So there is constant exhortation to the aryaas (the root Ri-gatau, one who is active, toiling) to unite and fight against the dasyus, the **akarmah daasyu** (Rg.10.22.8) one who does not labour is a robber. Out of several hundred such exhortations, I cannot resist the temptation to quote at least one of them there is this well known verse of the Rig Veda which refers as-

**In order to establish your political supremacy,
The toiling masses of the world unite.
And expropriate the expropriators.**

There is yet another very powerful exhortation; He who has exploited the wealth of others find him out. Identify him, and destroy him with the full fury of lightning. The Vedas tolerate no distinction based on colour or race or sex. Perfect equality of sexes in all walks of life is another salient feature of the vedic approach. The only distinction leading to confrontation is between the aryaas and dasyus; between the toiling masses and the exploiters. This to me is a clear case of class struggle. The clash is therefore not between the Hindu and the Muslim or between Christian and a Buddhist but has the toiling masses on the one side and the exploiters, the plunderers, the expropriators, on the other side. God is clearly in the side of the noble, the rational and the toiling people when she says; I give this land, this earth to the toiling people.

This in brief is an introduction to the liberation theology of the vedas. Armed with this liberation message of the Vedas, the Arya Samaj, a society of the noble, rational and toiling peoples movement was launched by Swami Dayanand in 1875. He was poisoned to death at the age of fifty nine in 1883 for his rebellious espousal of the liberation message. Very soon the Arya Samaj became a far runner of India's freedom struggle. With numerous educational institutions and centres for preaching this ideology. The Arya Samaj fought a relentless battle against forces of religious **bigotry** and obscurantism, casteism and **fatalism**, against idol worship and superstition. It inculcated in millions of young minds the indomitable spirit to question authority. It illuminated the struggle against British colonialism with martyrs like Bhagat Singh, Ram Prasad Bismil, Lajpat Rai, Swami Shradhananda and Swami Sahajananda.

Besides northern and central India. It has centres in several European, American and African Cities. But the growth of institutions took its toll of idealism and fervour and spirit of rebellion gave way to a status-quest approach. There is a move, however, of late mobilising growing support among the rank and file and the leadership of status quo is being challenged. An ideological weapon has, in the meantime, been forged and termed as vedic socialism. Several landmark movements have been fought under inspiring messages of vedic socialism. The movement of the farmers in Haryana, the movement against alcoholism in Haryana and elsewhere. The present movement for the liberation of five million bonded slaves in the stone quarries, brick kilns, carpet industry, landless agricultural labour and such like of India form an extension of the same liberation theology.

- Seminar 339-November 1987.

To the memory of a remarkable 21st century leader : Swami Agnivesh



Prof. KATHERINE MARSHALL

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Swami Agnivesh always made his mark. His presence awoke consciences, "his words left indelible marks, and his courage was a true goad and an "inspiration. He combined a spiritual and worldly presence in unique" ways. His spirituality evoked the very essence of the spiritual quest" for meaning but still more for justice and goodness. His worldly roles" saw clearly the injustices around us, named them, and demanded action "by those who had the power and duty to act. I was privileged to work with Swamiji in many different settings. He was always provocative: "provoking me to think more deeply and to search more diligently for "ways to make a difference, to right injustices, to impress the urgency "for bold action upon those inclined to procrastinate or turn to easier subjects. We look to those who speak truth to power, to prophets of "our troubled but exciting time. Swami Agnivesh, as Shakespeare said, "bestrode the stage like a giant. May his inspiration inflame us to "pursue the paths he traced. His humanity, his prophetic voice, his "example, his courage will not be forgotten."

SWAMI AGNIVESH : REFLECTIONS AND MEMORIES

September 14th, 2020 -Katherine Marshall

Swami Agnivesh not long after being tapped by World Bank President James Wolfensohn (in 2000) to translate an idea and ideal of dialogue between religious and secular leaders committed to development into reality. That challenge initially focused on two forms: first, meetings that brought together people from the two groups, and second, looking beyond warm statements that included an undue dose of platitudes to understand better the reasons for discord and, still more, hostility and indifference. I have thus had the privilege of meeting Swami Agnivesh often, in very different settings, in different corners of the world. We have also corresponded and spoken on other occasions. We shared a panel discussion on the role of faith in the Asia Pacific region in early July this year, as part of the United Nations High Level Political Forum. (<https://berkeleycenter.georgetown.edu/posts/swami-agnivesh-reflections-and-memories>

In Memory of Swami Agnivesh from WCPA

Swami Agnivesh was a Distinguished Advisor and Vice-President of the World Constitution and Parliament Association (WCPA). He was a prominent spokesperson for the *Constitution for the Federation of Earth* within India. His embrace of our work and the *Earth Constitution* during the past five years derived directly from his spiritual realization of the oneness of God with both our world and our human condition.

Swami wore the saffron robes of Indian religious leaders. Yet his realization was free of all dogma, doctrine, or ritual. He was free of all partisanship and exclusivity. Swami Agnivesh practiced exactly what he wrote about in his books, which he called "a radical idea of worship."

- Glent. Martin

Swami Agnivesh, Crusader Against Labour Abuses in India, Dies at 80

A pacifist monk, he championed social justice causes, fighting against child labor, indentured servitude and a rising tide of Hindu fundamentalism.

The Hindu monk Swami Agnivesh in New Delhi in 2018. He showed a willingness to put his life on the line in defense of the inclusive and plural faith he himself practiced, a colleague said.

Credit : R.S. Iyer Associated Press

-By Sameer Yasir
28th September, 2020

Swami Agnivesh, a revered long time campaigner against child labor and indentured servitude in India, died on September 11th in New Delhi. He was 80.

His death, in a hospital, was confirmed by an associate, Zayauddin Jawed, who said the cause was multiple organ failure.

A pacifist Hindu monk who renounced worldly possessions and relations at a young age, Mr. Agnivesh led a decades-long crusade against village money lenders, landlords and brick kiln owners who forced landless, debt-ridden farmers into bonded labor, or indentured servitude.

In 1981 he founded the Bandhua Mukti Morcha, or the Bonded Labour Liberation Front, which he headed until his death. From 1994 to 2004, he was chairman of the United Nations Voluntary Trust Fund on Contemporary Forms of Slavery.

"The country is diminished by his passing," Shashi Tharoor, one of India's most influential opposition politicians, wrote on Twitter.

Mr. Agnivesh was a prominent champion of many social justice causes and a trusted mediator when conflicts arose. He fought on behalf of tribal communities that had few rights to land ownership even though they populated much of the country's forests. In the 1980s, when environmentalists objected to settling bonded laborers on protected forest land, he helped defuse the situation, working out a compromise whereby much of the forest would continue to be preserved.

In 2011, after Maoist rebels abducted five police officers, leading to an 18-day hostage crisis in Chhattisgarh state, in central India, he helped negotiate their release.

"He had a steely courage, and enormous compassion," said Ramachandra Guha, a pre-eminent Indian historian who knew Mr. Agnivesh for over three decades.

In recent years, as Hindu nationalism continued to rise in India, Mr. Agnivesh was one of its biggest critics, saying the core values on which the republic was founded were under strain. He wrote last year, "The democratic space—where these values are meant to prevail—is communalized, polarized and poisoned with hate."

John Dayal, a fellow human-rights activist, said of Mr. Agnivesh: "His main challenge was the fundamentalist Hindu."

"The politicizing of Hinduism and the hijacking of sacred symbolisms for political gains—he abhorred it all," Mr. Dayal said.

Mr. Guha said he had admired Mr. Agnivesh's "willingness to put his life on the line in defense of the inclusive and plural faith he himself practiced."

Mr. Agnivesh was beaten many times; in one incident a mob of Hindu nationalists stripped, kicked and punched him, accusing him of inciting tribal groups to fight the government. He was convinced, he said later, that they had intended to kill him.

Image Mr. Agnivesh addressing supporters in the western Indian city of Ahmedabad in

OF HUMAN BONDAGE

Swami Agnivesh died on September 11th
The liberator of India's bonded labourers was 80



THE HINDU life-stage of sanyasa, or renunciation, is traditionally the last. The elderly lay aside their material possessions and take up a spiritual existence, perhaps in some remote ashram in the forest or the hills. Vepa Shyam Rao, as he was then, was only 30 when he took the title of Swami, or monk, put on saffron robes and travelled to Haryana, in northern India. His mission was still not quite in focus, but his philosophy was. He had gladly renounced his life as a lawyer and lecturer in management studies in Kolkata, reducing what he owned to his robes and a bagful of books. His career and his things he could lightly put aside. But the world and its problems, no.

His life from that moment was focused on some of the hardest parts of that world. The stone quarries outside Delhi, for example, where men, women and children were paid five rupees a day to dig out, shift and break great blocks of stone, as though they were beasts of burden. The unventilated, deafening carpet workshops where labourers were sometimes chained to the looms and locked in at night. Silk factories where hands already white with blisters plunged repeatedly into scalding water to reel the fibres from the cocoons, and tanneries where arms were burned with toxic chemicals. Outside his penetrating gaze, but mentioned in whispers, were the punishments for working slowly: a blow on the head from a brick, a beating while tied to a neem tree, or simply non-payment of the pitiful few coins that were supposed to have been earned.

Almost all this labour, he discovered in Haryana—which was abhorred of it—was indentured servitude.

The workers were landless Dalits or their children, forced to borrow to pay for medicines or dowries from a local, higher-caste moneylender. The average loan was around 2,000 rupees, or \$27, but at interest rates of 40% or more it could seldom be paid back. Payment was made in the form of labour from which workers could not escape, and the debt was passed down the generations. Many of these enslaved workers were therefore children, some as young as four or five. By his own estimates, of perhaps 60m bonded workers, 15m were under 14. Once he was on the watch for them he saw them everywhere: bending all day over tobacco baskets to hand-roll beedis, gathering broken cups outside teashops, picking rags. Their small, soft hands were thought ideal for delicate jobs such as knotting threads, dozens to each square centimetre, in carpet-making. But their bodies were deformed by it, and their lives shortened. There were laws against this, as against bonded labour in general. They were rarely enforced, because servitude was accepted as part of the natural order.

He did not accept it. In 1981 he set up the Bonded Labour Liberation Front, raising money to buy the freedom of as many workers as possible and to teach the rest what their rights were. Almost recklessly, because his bright robes advertised him everywhere, he and his helpers slipped into the wretched shanty-villages to encourage the labourers to organise. Eventually unions were created for stone-cutters, builders and brick-kiln workers; meanwhile, he battled employers in the courts. Those workers he managed to rescue—around 178,000 in all, roughly 26,000 of them children—were trained for new jobs or sent, for the first time, to school.

Much of this, especially the shouts of “Revolution!” after some of his worker meetings, seemed more political than priestly. But he did not see a distinction. He had decided early, under the influence of the Arya Samaj movement and the works of Gandhi and Marx, that his dharma or spiritual duty was to go among the poor, serving them. He called this “Vedical socialism”, and though completely guided by the Vedas, the most sacred texts of Hinduism, it had to involve political action. When followers treated him as a monk, bending

to touch his feet in respect, he would tell them to stop; he might recite a verse from an Upanishad one moment, but the next he would bequeathing, by paragraph number, an article of national law. In the late 1970s he actually became a politician in Haryana, and briefly education minister. But he fell out with the government when police fired on protesting bonded workers, and after that he was a one-man political party.

As such, he cast his interests wide. He took up the cause of tribal peoples without land rights and of farmers who could not get fair prices. He campaigned for better treatment of Dalits overall and pushed for laws empowering women, leading marches across India to protest against sati and female foeticide. In the villages, where he explained that God had created the Sun and Moon for men and women alike, he was feted as a celebrity, garlanded with marigolds and led round on elephants. The attention embarrassed him, but the publicity was good: the same reasoning that led him to appear in 2011 on the reality-TV show “Bigg Boss”, where he hoped he could bring peace to the other contestants in the house. In that role of peacemaker, he also trekked in 2011 into the forests of Chhattisgarh to oversee the handover by Maoist rebels of five abducted policemen. (In general, he thought the Maoists had been driven to violence by injustice, and urged the Indian government to talk to them.) He called often for dialogue with Muslims, too. This sort of thing got him regularly beaten up as anti-Hindu, a suggestion with which he had no patience. Certainly he rejected barbarisms such as sati, or the superstitious worship of stone idols. But the true enemies of Hinduism were elsewhere, in the Hindutva movement championed by the prime minister, Narendra Modi: fundamentalists who had perverted the sacred, inclusive power of Hinduism for partisan and nationalist ends. He saw nothing but calamity in the growth of that ideology in India.

His work with bonded labourers also caused him disappointment. Relatively speaking, he had rescued few, and the practice went boldly on. He might have taken heart, though, from the number who came to his funeral, shyly recounting to reporters the horror of their work before, and their hopes now. They, in particular, were glad he had not made his *sanyasa* in some remote mountain or forest but with them, in the weariness and pain and dust.

contd...from 99

2011. A pacifist monk, he championed social justice causes throughout India.

Mr. Agnivesh addressing supporters in the western Indian city of Ahmedabad in 2011. A pacifist monk, he championed social justice causes throughout India. Credit...Sam Panthaky/Agence France-Presse—Getty Images

Swami Agnivesh was born Vepa Shyam Rao on Sep. 21st, 1939, into an orthodox Hindu Brahmin family in the Srikakulam district of the southern state of Andhra Pradesh.

His father, Vepa Laxmi Narsinham, a farmer, died when Mr. Agnivesh was 4 years old. His mother, Sita Devi, a homemaker, died a year later. After he lost his parents, he was brought up by his maternal grandfather. He left no immediate survivors.

Mr. Agnivesh studied law and commerce at the University of Calcutta and, after graduating, became a professor of management studies at St. Xavier's College in the Indian state of West Bengal.

He briefly practiced law, but soon left to work in the northern states of Haryana and Punjab, both of them notorious for bonded labor.

For his work against child labor there he was awarded the Right Livelihood Award for humanitarian work in 2004, given by a Swedish-based foundation.

Mr. Agnivesh spent 14 months in jail after Prime Minister Indira Gandhi declared a national emergency in 1975, jailing political opponents and activists.

He fought against Mrs. Gandhi's Indian National Congress party, was elected to the state legislative Assembly in Haryana and was named a cabinet minister in Haryana. But he served just four months, pushed out after he protested against his own government, demanding an inquiry into the killing of 10 workers in an industrial township in a clash with police.

That episode led him to devote his life to fighting bonded labor.

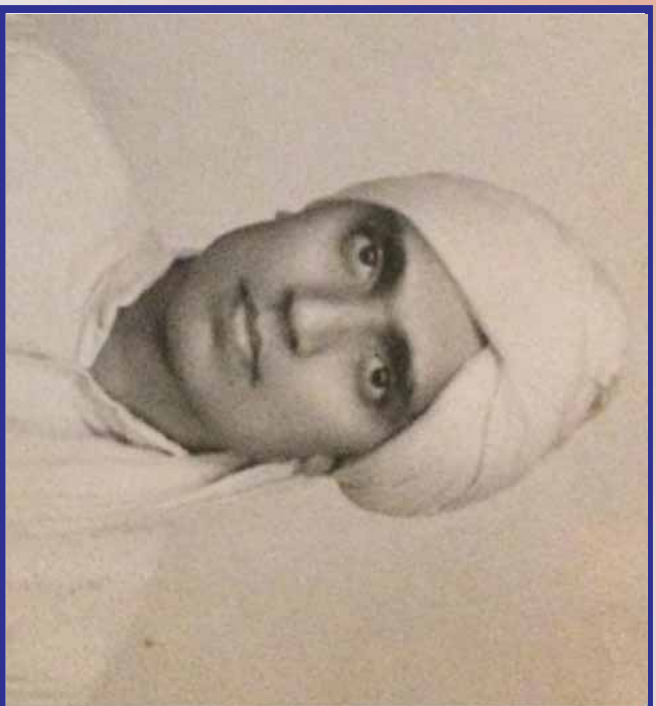
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13-09-2020

REMEMBERING THE SWAMI

Jitendra Ramprakash



At the time of posting this article, it is barely 40 hours that Swami Agnivesh passed away. And in these 40 hours, there is a surge of outpourings by people from all walks of life and all shades of political rainbow. Swami Agnivesh always firmly stood against the bigotry and communalism. This article by Jitendra Ramprakash is a personal tribute by this author who grew up seeing Swamiji and his father bonding together for the causes dear to them and later developing differences also but never losing mutual respect for each other. Though it's a personal tribute yet it tells so much about Swamiji that we are proud to publish it in this web-magazine. Please read on:

'Gaye Swami ji !' my father said. I, of course, said nothing in return. He too fell silent for a long while after that—a silence that my words can neither fathom, nor console. Theirs was a bitter-sweet bond, perhaps like no other in either man's life.

This house, tonight, is flooded with his memories. A house where he was welcomed like family, sometimes even criticised, yet always spoken of respectfully. A house, he had not visited in years, though he did remain in touch over the phone.

Mother came to my room, and with her hands folded, recounted his countless visits and the many meals she had served him. He had a right to his share of the bread in this house; a right he knew of, I realized. I noticed that I had rarely, if ever, seen her face softened such with sorrow and warmth. I also noticed for the first time that she, unlike dad, sometimes calls him just, Agnivesh.

It is a house that sorely misses a sannyasi tonight.

Swami Agnivesh with Dr. Ram Prakash, author's father.

It may sound odd to call a sannyasi that—but he was like a 'chacha' to me in my childhood. The houses of my uncle and father were always full of visiting ascetics, religious scholars and preachers. One of my own grand-uncles had taken sannyas, and to us children, it seemed nothing out of the ordinary. As I have said elsewhere, I saw so much saffron those days that I thought it was the normal way of dressing. None of them made for a forbidding presence. Swami Bhishma, Arya Bhikshu, Swami Indraves and many others that I do not even remember the names of—always affectionate, they were like uncles and elders, with some of whom I even played games that a child that age normally would. For some reason though, I never took that liberty with him. His presence inspired a certain awe even then—he stood out from the rest—radiant, magnetic, charismatic.

My father and he go back more than fifty years, when he, a certain Vepa Shyam Rao was yet to take sannyas. Both were young Vedic scholars, somewhat radical thinkers, committed religious activists and fiery orators that crowds thronged to hear in large numbers. I was too young then to understand any of their speeches and passed my time, counting the number of times that the applause rang out, and the number of people moved to tears, hoping secretly that dad would have outscored the Swami on both counts. Sadly, of

words spoken and written, the former, though more powerful also fade faster. Those who haven't heard them in their prime can not imagine the sublime oratory that I have rarely if ever, heard matched. It is the stuff of legends that some may have heard of from others.

Just play a piece of the Swami's speeches in his seventies, listen to that voice and try if you can, to imagine what they must have sounded like in their thirties. Volcanic and luminous, their voices swayed audiences at will. Brothers bonded by faith, Swami Samarpananand had famously dubbed the fiery duo as 'Ram aur Shyam'.

It was a matter of faith again, about four decades later, because of which the two fell apart. Dad was unequivocal in his stand against the Swami on ideological issues. I have with me, the copy of a letter he wrote then, which I won't share here, for it belongs between the two men. It must be among the politest harsh letters a man can write to his comrade. Words, that speak of life-long bonds, hurt, principles and a respectful yet sharp parting of ways. Unlike some of his other critics though, I never heard from dad, a word, disrespectful. He was always referred to, even in criticism, as Swami ji. It was not for me to intervene, though I occasionally missed having the Swami at home, for as dad knew and Swami ji didn't, I had my own philosophical disagreements with both.

Time, has a way, of not only causing separations, but also of sometimes remedying them. It was faith again that brought the two together. Another decade later, I found myself helping dad edit a book that comprised articles by over fifty scholars. It was for him, a mission of the soul, and he had decided to bring together the finest scholars of the subject, some of whom did not get along well with each other. "So, who is to write on Vedic monotheism?" I had routinely asked, lost in the heaps of typed papers that lay before me. "Swami ji!" "What! Who?" I could barely mutter in disbelief. "Swami ji!" he smiled, "I have spoken with him and he has gladly consented." I just smiled back at him and said nothing.

Swami ji, I guess, always found other social activities more engaging than writing, and that piece had to find another author, but he did contribute three articles by other scholars to the volume from his archives. It was with a sense of personal satisfaction that I edited a footnote and typed his name as a contributor.

.....There is a picture of his that I had clicked and have probably lost forever.

Words, unfortunately, will have to do for it instead. "Swami ji wants to speak with you. Here is the number. Call him now," my father demanded, knowing how I procrastinate in such matters. I was told that he had read something I had written and had apparently

had a long chat with dad about it. I gave in to dad's insistence, and was somewhat surprised that Swami ji had indeed read the piece rather carefully, as he quoted and dwelt upon passages at some length. He declared with a sense of right that I was to help him edit a volume that he was planning, and quickly extracted a promise that I would meet him at the earliest.

There he was! That presence, that smile, that voice! He was still the dreamer that I had once known him to be. I was at once surprised, reassured and even a little worried.

As I helped him finalise the session-plan for the Vishwa Ved Sammelan he had already scheduled, I kept gently cautioning him about the scale of the event and the ones he had planned for the future. I even told him that no one was going to give him sufficient funds. Beyond a point, one should not argue with old men who can still dream. So, I got busy editing some articles that I had promised him, and he made a phone call to a person in the government with the same professed ideals as him. His voice betrayed the expected. As he put down the phone, I looked up from the laptop, "Kya keh rahe hain vo?" I had expected the outcome, but not the candid confession that followed. Trustingly, he said, sounding neither surprised nor too disappointed, "Vo keh rahe hain ki vo madad nahi kar sakte, kyonki unke senior... mujhe communist mante hain!"

I said nothing to him, smiled, and went back to the edit. He asked me if I wanted to eat something and then went out to make a few more phone calls.

Tired of the editing, I stepped out for some fresh air and there I saw him again, outside his office. A few feet away, was a life-size flex that I hadn't noticed on my way in. In big, bold letters, it had the famous words by Pash, "Sabse khatarnaak hota hai...."

I couldn't help but laugh out loud, "Kya galat keh rahe hain vo!" and with my own sense of right over him, told him, "Yahaan aakar khade hoije, is kavita ke paas. Mujhe photo leni hai apki!"

He obliged, and I clicked the picture that I cannot find now, but remains my last memory of him!

So, how do I judge him?

I don't! Increasingly, we are reluctant to empathise, unable to analyse and quick to judge. We make much noise, listen very little, read even less and understand next to nothing.

Let me just share a few lines from his book** that he had gifted me that evening...

"Why should religions meet? ...Religions must meet first of all for their self-liberation. Second, there must be an emphasis on their revitalization as agents of social liberation and transformation... Third, religions must meet and help each other in fulfilling their

historical destiny as instruments for peace and human welfare.

...obvious truth of modern history affords a basic insight. The conflictual model of inter-religious relationships is a product of religious degeneration. The foremost symptom of this degeneration is that the religious goal gets hijacked from social justice and social transformation into religious expansionism and politico-economic domination. The love of power (the hidden political motive) is incompatible with the power of love, which is the true religious outlook.

...Barring glorious exceptions in history, religion has played mostly a pro-status quoist role, rather than a transforming role. That is because of the idea of religion itself, which now needs to be radically reviewed.

...The quintessential business of religion is to reinforce a sense of universal kinship. Instead, religion has been misused and abused as an apology for erecting walls of division and separation.

...All scriptures are mixed-up affairs. There is much in them of undying and eternal value. But there is also a great deal that needs to be subjected to rational and historical scrutiny. Scripture needs to be tested on the touchstone of life. The primacy of life demands that whatever is anti-life and socially iniquitous, even if it may claim scriptural warrant, needs to be given up.

...Today religion is politicized and politics communalized. In this process the people in need are lost sight of. The ascendancy of vested interests threatens to splinter our society and cripple our country. Avoidable suffering and deprivation mount. The foremost need of the hour is a spiritual regeneration so as to imbue progress with social justice and moral passion.

... Dialogue must be a pilgrimage to the depth. It must be a mutual engagement which liberates and transforms the participants. ...dialogue cannot any longer remain an esoteric exercise which some privileged people indulge in. It must become an integral part of our way of life. ... Dialogue must not be a fringe activity, but a shared culture. ...Over arching all these, is the need to shift from the dialogue of words to the dialogue of deeds.

... But we live in a world of disrupted dialogues. For that reason, there is a need to facilitate dialogue: to set up the matrix, mechanisms, means and mindset of dialogue. That is the most important task.

The challenge is to sustain the sacrament of dialogue in an age of lovelessness.

...We must dialogue not only because the global community is sitting over a likely holocaust, which it is. We must converse, even more importantly, because we are human beings and dialogue is the “milk of our humankind-ness”. Of course, we have reached a stage in which the alternative to dialogue is the winter of

our humanity. Our very survival as a sane species hangs on it.”

.....
All fine men have their flaws.
All persons of ideas, have some that are questionable.

All, who lead a life of action, take steps, sometimes inconsistent with their path.

There is no denying the fact however, that this was a fine man of faith !

A man who believed in debate, dialogue and dissent.

A Vedic sannyasi who strove for true dharma, inter-religious dialogue, social justice, and what he called Vedic Socialism.

“Satyam Vad, Dharmam Char !” the man often quoted.

A man who was needed for much longer!

“He was a very good human-being. Ideological differences don’t really matter,” my mother said, as she left my room last evening. I said nothing to her too, but noticed that her hands were still folded in prayer and remembrance.

All quotes from—Applied Spirituality/Swami Agnivesh

*Dr. Jitendra Ramprakash

Jitendra Ramprakash is a theorist whose work focuses on the inter-disciplinary Philosophy of creativity. His other interests include aesthetics and the Indian Philosophies, and has co-edited the book, ‘Arya Samaj and the Vedic Worldview’. A former television-presenter and professor, he also set up Asia’s first ‘Poetry Film Festival’, introduced sign-language poetry-films to India and has produced albums of poetry recordings by some senior Indian poets. These days, he manages a rural school and earns his living through part-time voicing.

Photo credits:

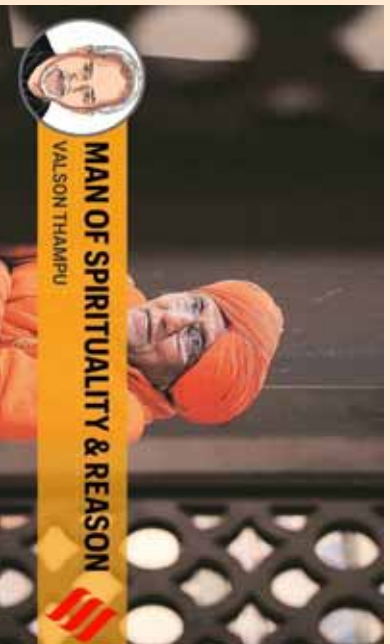
- 1) Swami Agnivesh—from the archives of Mrs. Vijay Kumari
- 2) Dr. Ram Prakash and Swami Agnivesh in the 1970s—from the archives of Mrs. Vijay Kumari
- 3) Jitendra Ramprakash/photo Gulfam Ali



Swami Agnivesh with Dr. Ramprakash

SWAMI AGNIVESH BELIEVED THAT A THEOCRATIC STATE WAS DANGEROUS

*Swami Agnivesh was a votary of secular democracy.
He fought to the bitter end the communalisation of the state, which he deemed a crime against history.*



Swami Agnivesh was keen to initiate an objective, rational debate on religion.

Swami Agnivesh (1939-2020) spent the last two months of his life in hospital. During this period, we talked to each other almost daily on phone. Never once did he mention the health crisis he was battling. Every word he said was about what needed to be done. He lived and died a quintessential activist.

Our paths crossed a quarter-century ago, accidentally, as it then seemed. Today, it seems willed by destiny. A coincidence, wrote Arthur Koestler, is “two events held together by an unseen hand”. That unseen hand never departed from our association. What struck me first was his rippling vitality, his infectious enthusiasm, his quixotic optimism. He had no patience with the academia, which he had quit at the age of 27. “Your tribe,” he told me, “wastes time interpreting the world. The thing to do is to change it.” That, if you like, was the Marxian streak in him.

His heart was with the poor. I was not surprised, therefore, that he was labelled a communist—a sort of saffron-clad Trojan horse in religion. Swamiji had a knack for turning a slap on the face into a pat on the back. He wore this slur with aplomb. He quoted the South American bishop, Helder Camara, in this connection: “When I give food to the poor they call me a saint; when I ask why they are poor, they call me a Communist.” He was called a Maoist too, a Christian, a Muslim, and the like. There was some truth in all of these, for he loved everyone, including the Maoists. He disapproved their ways, but he regarded them as fellow human beings. That went for Christians, Muslims and Hindus as well.

Arguably, the most unorthodox thing about him was his instinct for politics. His detractors held that his religion was a camouflage. But, to him, politics was to spiritual concerns what technology was to science. It secured effectiveness. He should have

learned from the life of Gandhi that mixing spirituality and politics—especially standing on spiritual ideals in the practice of politics—is the riskiest thing to do. Like Gandhi, he paid for it, at the fag end of his life.

What is the legacy that this great soul leaves us? From Agnivesh I learned that life is worth nothing if one’s freedom is compromised for any purpose. Maharshi Dayanand being his role-model, Swamiji identified a heroic commitment to truth as the backbone of his spiritual personality. He used to quote Jesus’ words, “The truth will set you free.” The flip-side was that he wouldn’t fit into any system. He was hated even by a section of the Arya Samaj. But millions loved him.

The most crucial thing for him was the idea of God. He believed that misconceiving God was the root cause of religious decay. To him, all religions were equally corrupt in this respect. He concluded that freedom from religion was the sine qua non for practising freedom of religion. To him, love for fellow human beings—especially the downtrodden—was the hallmark of love for God. This made him equate godliness with social spirituality.

He was a votary of secular democracy. He fought to the bitter end the communalisation of the state, which he deemed a crime against history. He was proud of his Vedic vision but believed that a theocratic state was ominous for what it portends. He believed that secularism in India would succeed only on a firm spiritual footing. Spirituality, unlike religion, is guided by reason. Reason is universal, integrative. Faith is divisive.

He was keen to initiate an objective, rational debate on religion. We had been planning to bring out a publication. As he got admitted to the hospital, he reminded me of its urgency. He took an active part in the progress of this work from his hospital bed to a surprising extent. He read each chapter and offered comments. I feel gratified that the first draft of the manuscript could be completed before Swamiji’s health took an irretrievable turn. I left it to him to title the book. “Let’s call it,” he said, “Children of Eternal Spirit, Unite!”. So it stands.

I feel grateful and privileged to have shared a life lived so fully, richly, vitally. Shakespeare’s words ring in mind as I think of this great soul: “Here was a man indeed; when comes such another?”

Thampu was principal of St. Stephen’s College, Delhi. ●

When people ask how I came to know you, I tell them my famous “eggless fruit cake story”

-Sudhira Sham ji

At a meeting of the Arya Samaj early in 1995 my mother had promised the committee organising the 75th Anniversary Celebrations that she would bake cakes for the main function. When she passed away shortly before the date of the function, the onus of making these special cakes and taking them to the hall, fell on my sister, some friends and me. We thus had the opportunity to hear you speak and I made up my mind to visit your organisation and learn about bonded and child labour. A small group of us interacted with Bandhua Mukti Morcha later that year and I have visited many times since then, bearing the famous fruit cake.

I have had the honour and privilege of listening to your fine oratory skills, not only in huge halls filled with intellectual giants but also in the gatherings of the poorest people in the shack settlements. I have watched, in awe, your ability to keep both these groups spell bound—the intellectuals with your amazing rhetoric, the poor with your love and compassion, and both these groups with the fire that your whole life is imbued with.

Every time I visited the poor in the quarries of Faridabad, I became more aware of the love these people had for you. On one occasion, I was talking to a group of women about their lives as labourers. One woman said to me, “Before Swami ji came to help us, we had nothing. Now we have hope and we can fight for our rights.” I understood then what you have always spoken about; that it is vital that the poor and downtrodden be taught to fight for their rights and not just be given hand-outs.

When you visited the elite private schools, just before Diwali every year, you surprised the children by not reciting the story of the Ramayan, but by asking them to change the way they celebrated the day. They listened earnestly when you asked them to spend the money on helping the poor rather than on fire works and some of them later reported with pride that they had followed your advice. They even “donated” their birthday parties to the poor children from the quarries and I was really thrilled to accompany you to observe the happiness the treats brought those children.

I loved visiting the schools you set up in the quarries and observing you exhort the parents to

send their children to school. Small as the schools were, they were little beacons of hope for the labourers. Helping Kusma Rao with the training centre in Garhi gave me a new insight into your work for women's rights and the rights of the sweepers' children to education.

I enjoyed, most of all, watching your interaction with little children. When I took you to visit Gandhi ji's settlement at Phoenix near Durban and a group of pre-scholars came up to you, you stopped discussing serious matters and began playing with them, tossing them up in the air and making them laugh out loud with sheer joy. You enjoyed that more than they did!

Almost as intense, is your love for wild animals and I was fortunate enough to observe your reaction to many of them in the Pinesberg Game Reserve and your close counter with a giraffe. I also admire your love for nature and the environment, whether it was walking on the beach, sitting outside to have a meal or watching the ocean from my yard. I was also truly impressed with the simplicity of the ashram at Be help a and the abundance of trees there.

I met many wonderful people when I accompanied you to your various talks around South Africa and also in India and learned so many new concepts and ways of looking at how the world should be, how people should change their whole approach to life, how religion should be replaced by spirituality and how we should discard those things that keep people apart. I admire how easily you exchange ideas with them.

Most of all I admire your courage in challenging religious institutions and religiosity. It never ceases to amaze me. The more fundamentalist the religious people have become the more determined you are to make the whole world a family. I did cringe when I first heard you utter your radical ideology but I see your point of view and I know that it comes from a profound love of humanity and so I am beginning to understand more and more how important it is for us all to promote the idea of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam.

Like so many others, I hope that I can achieve a little more victory in your battle to rid the world of the divisions that keep humanity apart.

I have been, and will happily remain your loyal foot soldier.

Swami Agnivesh—A Prophet for all Seasons

- Fr. J. Felix Raj, SJ

Vice-Chancellor, St. Xavier's University, Action Area IIIB New Town, Kolkata- 60 India, Tel. 033-66249812

By Fr. J. Felix Raj, SJ The 80-year old former professor of St. Xavier's College (1963-69) and friend of St. Xavier's University, Kolkata and a social activist was an advocate for dialogue between religions. He was involved in various areas of social activism including campaigns against female feticide and the emancipation of women. He was a prominent associate of Anna Hazare during the India against Corruption's campaign in 2011 to implement the Jan Lokpal Bill.

Swami Agnivesh was truly "a man for others"...A sanyasi in the Arya Samaj Order, he stood tall, both on the national and international stage, as an educationist, a philanthropist, a philosopher, a spiritualist, most of all as a humanist. The sublime words of Saint Ignatius of Loyola, founder of the Jesuit Order applies to him perfectly... "He was contemplative in action, finding God in all things". And also important to me, Swamiji and I were close associates and friends.

Vepa Syam Rao was born into a Brahmin upper caste Telegu family. He completed his Masters from Calcutta University. He taught at St. Xavier's College from 1963 to 1969. At 24 young Rao was inquisitive and curious to know the inner workings of the Belgian Jesuits. One day he sneaked into the Jesuit residence known as cloister and peeped in. The austerity and simplicity of the Jesuit living quarters astounded him Only a table, two chairs, a bed and a wooden almira.

It was unbelievable... 'The Jesuits lived a life of high thinking and simple living,' this made a deep impact on him. While coming out of the Jesuit cloister Rao met a senior Belgian Jesuit in the corridor. He asked the priest as to what had motivated him to come to the distant shores of India leaving behind his home and the comforts he had had there.

The Jesuit answered him.... 'I am here like my fellow Jesuit Fathers. Our mission is to serve the people of India, particularly of Bengal, mainly to impart quality education to Indian students; this is the humble contribution we hope to make.'

Swamiji was deeply impressed and he has often reiterated that this response by the Jesuit priest had an influence on his future life and missionary zeal.

He said, 'it made me ponder. What is MY mission for India?

Swamiji has always stressed his strong faith in spirituality. He insists that spirituality ought to be social spirituality. This spirituality should not be an individualistic or escapist type. He insists that it should be one that would keep the interest of the society intact which would depend on the respect for individual interest. These are inextricably linked. They are complimentary... religion must be a thrust for social awakening and revolution. Swamiji has written a number of books on this subject to promote and share his views and ideas (listed below).

Swamiji was a bridge between religions, respecting the differences.... 'Do unto others as you would have others do unto you,' was his golden rule. He further advocated, if we want life, let us give life to others; if we want opportunities, let us provide these opportunities to others. God's love is the same for all, no matter what one's religion or nationality is.' He was against the throw away culture, where people not only throw junk but also the poor, the refugees and the down trodden. He promoted through his work an education in fraternity for real solidarity. This in fact was the essence of Swamiji's conviction and work.

He was a relentless fighter for the down trodden not caring for personal attacks or even results... just fight till something positive emerges was his firm belief. As Shakespeare said, reiterated by Justice V.R. Krishnaier. 'What a piece of work is a man, how noble in reason, how infinite faculty, in form and moving how express and admirable, in action how like an angel, in apprehension how like a god, never at rest but ever in meditative communication with God.'

Swamiji was diamond hard in his convictions, honeybee in his sweet collectivism for all suffering humans, a defender of the constitution and a humanist, aware of the religious pluralism of Bharat. Anything that might destroy the fabric of this country or threaten its development was the recipient of his ire.

Swami Agnivesh was indeed a man among men.... A prophet for all seasons on the side of truth and justice with a deep seated spiritual perspective. A true inspiration. A Karma Yogi, Champion of the socially challenged.... A true Arya Samaji.

<https://scroll.in/article/975870/treat-everyone-equally-and-move-them-toward-truth-and-justice-a-novelist-interviews-agnivesh>

Treat everyone equally, move them toward truth and justice:

A Novelist's Interview with Agnivesh

KaranMahajan recounts conversations with the social reformer, who died on September 11

- Karan Mahajan



I met the late activist Swami Agnivesh in May 2018, two months before he was attacked by Bharatiya Janata Party-linked mobs in Jharkhand. Relaxed between travels, he sat sipping tea in his Delhi office in a sweater of saffron. A pot-bellied, clear-skinned man with silver-rimmed glasses and veined hands, he looked and spoke like the kindly head of a university.

His head and ears were covered with a tightly-wound saffron turban; he wore a saffron kurta and a slightly torn saffron dhoti; on his wrist was a watch with a saffron strap. Even the Godrej behind him and the plastic rubbish bin under his desk were shades of saffron. When he put down his cup of green tea, it was on an iPad with a saffron cover.

Agnivesh, who was a sprightly 78 when I met him, spent his life defying the stereo type senced in that colour. Though outwardly a “swami”, he was much closer to being a fire brand socialist activist, a drop out from the academy who pursued the rights of workers, particularly bonded labourers. He spoke fluent Telugu, Hindi, and English; and was equally at ease in international conferences and rustic bandhs. But his primary and most cherished identity remained that of an Arya Samaji.

Agnivesh had joined the reformist Arya Samaj as a young man in 1950s Calcutta, he had been enormously taken by its zeal to rid Hinduism of cant. He idolised Dayanand Saraswati, the founder of the sect, modeling his attire and truth-seeking attitude on Saraswati's. But the sect had, over the years, drifted toward the politics of the BJP and the Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh, leaving Agnivesh stranded on his own little island of saffron idealism.

From there, he relentlessly hectorred Hindu fundamentalists while pursuing a slate of liberal and secular causes: communal harmony, Kashmir, the rights of tribals and women.

My conversation with him over two afternoons in his fan-swept office—a set of two small rooms, one roofed with green fibre glass, in a dilapidated and litigation-frozen Lutyens complex—focused largely on the Samaj, which I was researching for a writing project.

During this time, he spoke to me in his low energy-conserving voice, a half-smile playing on his lips, his comments punctuated with small chuckles as he touched his chin. He effortlessly multi-tasked, stopping now and then to speak to Muslim and Hindu groups on his (saffron) cell phone and ear piece; discussing workers’

rights and politics with fellow activists; receiving a Turkish visitor from an interfaith dialogue group; giving instructions to an employee on a laptop; taking time to say sweet words to a child brought in by a visitor; and then picking up the thread of our conversation wherever we had left it.

“But whatever you are taking down,” he advised me at one point, “you should not agree with what I’m saying. Question, make your own decisions.”

When I instinctively reached down to touch his feet the second time I met him—the training of a good Hindu boy kicking in—Agnivesh stopped me, saying, “I don’t believe in it.” He was not immune to vanity—he was surrounded by prizes and regaled me with tales of his meetings with international activists and politicians—but he had a prodigious, clear memory and a sense of his mistakes. He did not look anywhere near 78.

I was grateful for his time and his honesty. Two months later, I was horrified to learn that while visiting Jharkhand for his work with tribals, Agnivesh was attacked—on camera—by a mob of more than 20 BJP-associated workers, who accused him of being a “Pakistani agent” collaborating with Naxalites. Disheveled and stripped of his turban and robe, he sustained liver and rib injuries. A month after that, he was on a Lutyens street, on his way to offer condolences for the death of Atal Behari Vajpayee, when another mob of BJP-linked youth activists surrounded him and began pushing and shoving him.

Agnivesh was no stranger to confrontation—especially in his work against Salwa Judum in Chhattisgarh—but now he was nearly 80. After this, he became weak. On September 11th this year, he passed away from complications arising from his liver and rib injuries. No one was ever charged in Jharkhand and the judiciary declined to let the CBI investigate the assaults.

I was in California when I heard about his death. I had driven there across the US through a landscape of masks and Trump flags. The day before Agnivesh’s death, the Californian sky had been hijacked by a dark, apocalyptic shade of saffron—the sun filtering through a layer of suspended ash from the wild fires. To me, Agnivesh’s death felt like another aspect of this impending apocalypse. I couldn’t help but connect the colour of the sky with him.

An excerpt from our interview—about how Agnivesh came to join the Arya Samaj and how the Samaj itself has changed.

What kind of Hinduism did you grow up with?

I was born in a very orthodox Brahmin family, and

brought up with all those rituals. I used to worship gods and goddesses everyday—morning and evening—in my grandfather’s temple room. I believed it wholeheartedly but there was no body to explain what it meant, metaphorical or otherwise. If Ganesh is there, then Ganesh is there. Even the prime minister is saying he has an elephant head because of plastic surgery [laughs].

If I was going to school and a cat crossed my path or I sneezed, it was in auspicious. Bhoots come at night and pick up children. Who’ll save you from the bhooth? Hanumanji. So I read the Hanuman Chalisa. My own mother would be out of bounds for me for three days every month. I couldn’t touch her or I’d have to bathe.

The caste system was also there. We are Brahmins and those who are working on the fields of my grandfather, definitely belonged to the lowest caste. We used to call them Kamaiya at home but did not realise that they were our bonded laborers. Kamaiya is now



A memorial event for Agnivesh on September 18.

the name for the bonded labor system in Chhattisgarh region under the law of 1976. If there was anything left over in my family, I was told as a child to go and give it to them, but specifically told not to touch them, but to throw it at them. So I used to do that and come back.

But when I interacted with Arya Samaj people, read [Dayanand Saraswati’s] Satyarth Prakash—particularly the 11th chapter—where Swami Dayanand boldly criticises his own religion, attacking Brahmanism, my eyes opened immediately.

How did you come to read it? Why were you interested?

One day, when I was going around colleges in Calcutta for my admission, I was returning home when there was a heavy rain. On Chowringhee, I sought protection under the canopy of Metro Cinema. As I got out, I saw that there was a cloth banner saying Arya Samaj Parivarik Satsang. I did not know anything about Arya Samaj,



but I assumed "paravarik satsang" must be puja-path and kirtan-bhajan, and so I thought, let me go see it what it is.

I went down a dark alley and up the stairs into a room. An acharya was sitting on little dais and giving a lecture to 40-50 middle-aged people. There was hardly any idol and no worship. So it was a different type of satsang for me. Out of curiosity, I stayed there. But listening to what he was saying was very fascinating. He was explaining the meaning of some Ved mantra and he also just focused his eyes on me because I was the youngest, 17 years old.

When he finished his speech he walked over to me and asked my name. Then immediately he left all other things and took me outside and we sat for one hour on the small islands that are there in between the trams, talking. And there he told me, I should go and meet him next day morning.

The next morning, I went to the Arya Samaj place where he was holding a bal satsang—for children. Out of the kids I was the eldest. The acharya also told me to come to the older people's satsang. It was complete departure from whatever I used to practice in the name of religion—no ritual, no dogma, nothing. One was encouraged to ask questions. And then I was given this book Satyarth Prakash.

I imbibed these values very fast, as if they were dormant in me. I didn't put up any resistance, it all came naturally to me. The Vedas saying that God is universal

and God is therefore formless and we have been worshipping Gods with all those idols and taking pictures. As they say, the newly converted becomes a strong proponent, so I would also loudly come into my house and fight with my sister, saying, why are you doing all this murthy-puja, this is blind faith, and she'd say, you do what you want to do and let us do what we want to do. I'd also fight with my mother, saying, leave all this, it's wrong. And she'd say, this is what we believe, it's our Hindu dharma, it's what we grew up in.

There was a Kali mandir on College Street where they would slaughter goats. When they would first catch the goat, the goat would be fearful and would cry out. What kind of devi is this that needs the blood of goats? I started questioning all these gods, goddesses, rituals, idol worship, caste system, and also in a way, communalism. It simplified and demystified god and religion for me. It's more important for me, I realised, to have communion with my god inside of my heart and mind, rather than step outside and go to a temple. So, I saved time, I saved money, everything was saved [laughs].

I can see why Satyarth Prakash was ground breaking book for its time but parts of it that are out dated. It attacks other major religions, like Islam and Christianity, for example. I can see how followers of Arya Samaj would start looking at the book as fact and say, we also have to attack these religions.

You have to take the spirit of Satyarth Prakash, not go by words or letters. The main spirit is questioning authority and to start with one's own faith tradition. If you look at the language when he's attacking other religions—like Islam and Christianity—it is not so strong, but when he attacks his own religion, it's no-holds-barred. This is what I liked most about Dayanand. Whatever religion you're born into is not in your hand. But if you want to really grow as a human being, then you have to start questioning those very practices in which you have been initiated as an innocent child.

There are two strands in Arya Samaji history. One is the liberal strand, which was involved in the freedom struggle and was against caste and child marriage. But the other thread has promoted the shudhi movement [the equivalent of “ghar-wapsi”] and anti-Muslim activities. What was your experience of this latter strand when you joined?

I became Arya Samaji in 1966. I was fascinated by everything that the Arya Samajis were preaching. Top leaders would come from Punjab to Arya Samaj Calcutta. I was a student and I would listen to them late into the night.

At that time, I did not question this shudhi movement or anything like that. Later on I started slightly questioning: why is it that in all instances they impute motives against Christianity and also against Islam? I became aware of this but I did not question it very much. In my own zeal to be a good Arya Samaji, I started picking up anti-Christian things from the Samaj. I would collect all the material in which they would tell us that just as Pakistan was demarcated on the basis of Islam, so a day will come when Christians will also demand a separate nation and it will be “Isaistan.”

They would criticise the Nagaland leader [Angami Zapu] Phizo and along with him, Jayprakash Narayan, who would be holding dialogue with all these separatist leaders. They said that Jharkhand is going to become the hot bed of this “Isaistan” as the tribals have been converted into Christianity.

Later on, when I started teaching law in St. Xavier's, I would go and visit my sister in Rourkela. Very close to her place was a Ved Vyas Ashram. There I would meet with one Swami Brahmananda. I would take a scooter and then drive up to his place in the forest and stay with him for a couple of days. Swami Brahmananda would occasionally come to Calcutta and appeal for donations and blankets to save tribals from getting converted to Christianity. He would get a very good response.

Immediately the rich Marwaris would come up with donations. I was also impressed that he was [apparently] saving our religion and fighting against Christianity like a missionary. And in my heart I had thought a little bit that whenever opportunity comes my way, I will also do this—fight against Christians.

I was a pracharantri [head of the preachers] in Arya Samaj Calcutta [while teaching at St. Xavier's] and I would gather old clothes and pots and pans and distribute them in the slums to the poor. Arya Samaj people also liked it: Professor Shyam Rao [Agnivesh's birth name] goes among the poor to stop the Christians.

Sunday morning I would go out to the churches, which were preparing for their 9 o'clock or 10 o'clock sermons. I used to take printed sheets against Christianity and foreign missionaries and put them inside the Bibles lying on each seat. Then, kneeling down like a faithful Christian in the back, I would watch the whole thing.

When it would be time for the worshippers to come and open the Bible and say the prayer, the paper would fall out, and they would say, what is this? There would be a lot of commotion. Who put it there, what happened? Then I would feel happy. *Oh, I've done my religious work and feel proud. [chuckle].*

St. Xavier's College started around 7.30 am. But I would go there at 6.30, with these big used newspapers which I had written on at home: Foreign missionaries Quit India! Xaviers was being run by foreign missionaries. I would put them up on the black boards in different rooms, when even the cleaners had not yet started their jobs. Then I would go to my staff room and order some tea-coffee-samosa and sit innocently.

When the college would start, the boys and teachers would go into their room and see, Oh! What is this? Who put it up? Nobody could find out and I used to feel very happy about this work. Then I researched some books from the library. I found out this whole thing (of English education and conversion) was started way back by Thomas Babington Macaulay. Then Frederick Max Muller. In his own words he had said that my task is to translate the Vedas in such a way that it facilitates conversion of a Hindu into Christianity.

I published a small booklet called Max Muller Exposed. It had a yellow cover. In Calcutta there was a big Max Muller Bhavan and they would hold cultural events. One evening there was a Max Muller function in that hall of a Hindi school run by the Birlas. In the night, in the dark under a streetlight, as the Germans and Indian elite entered, I would give them each a copy and they would just take it as if I'm giving them something about the programme. Inside, when they read

it, the Germans were particularly angry. By that time I had slipped away. [chuckles]

A week or so later, I got a call from the Max Muller Bhavan inviting me for a dialogue. My name was on the booklet and they had found out that I was teaching in St. Xavier's College.

I was 25 or 26 and had just spent two-three years in Xaviers by then. A big car came to get me. Quite a number of scholars were present. The head of that Max Muller Bhavan Calcutta was a German, a Max Muller scholar. When the discussion started, they took objection to my book. And they said that I should not be doing that type of writing and spreading this as our two countries are friends.

I said all your criticism is well taken, but I've given you specific quotations in my book. Take out the book from your own library. Is such a such thing written there or not? If it is true, then you will have to accept my criticism. If it is not true, then I will not only apologise but print another book and distribute it. They were not ready for that. They sort of threatened me that I should know which college I was teaching in. It was a Jesuit college and they thought that once the college gets to know, they'll sack me.

But that's another amazing thing about these Christian missionaries—even after they realised that I was doing this propaganda against Christianity, against foreign missionaries, against Max Muller, Macaulay, etc., they never ever said a word or showed any disaffection.

That's a really great thing. Then, one day, I sneaked into the rooms where these Belgian fathers—who were scholars in the irrespective fields—lived.

These were small rooms on the fourth floor of our building in Park Street, each with a simple bed, washbasin and a solid tablelamp. Such spartan living. I went into their canteen and I saw what they ate. Simple food—bread, butter, some eggs. They were dressed in those white robes. Then I asked myself: what is this? I had by then got in touch with a professor from Harvard University, who was in Calcutta as part of World Bank-sponsored Planning Commission of India and government of India study about transport requirements another 20 years hence. I had been appointed, during my free time, as an assistant to this professor.

He was very pleased with my work and sincerity and then when he was going back, he said, "Why don't you think of coming to the US, to Harvard—I will get a job for you." I myself was thinking: what's there in India, crowds and mosquito; I'll run to America and live nicely.

But then I looked at these Belgian priests, living so simply, and eating such simple food. I asked myself: they left all the comforts of their own country where as I want to leave India and go settle abroad. What is the reason? The reason I found was: they had a mission, they were missionaries. I asked myself: what's my mission? I was there without a mission. I was like a mercenary, not a missionary. And then I said to myself: no, I must find my own mission.



And then, this internal debate—with the very Christian priests whom I was opposing—inspired me to change my decision and devote myself to work among the poorest of the poor. And later on, to work on bonded labour.

Agnivesh meets Francis, the pope. Credit: Giulio d'Adamo/WFP

“Isaistan” is a crazy idea, but that kind of thinking has remained and become more main stream, if anything. Same with the idea that we had aeroplanes and plastic surgery thousands of years ago. How can that be combated? When did you start to realise yourself that these things you were printing and reading were false?

When I was in jail during Emergency I started to reads and reflect. I wrote a small book there inside the jail in 1976 called Arya Samaj: Kya Kare, Kidhar Jaye? After getting out of jail I printed 1,000 copies and distributed them for free in Arya Samaj. The first paragraph deals with Shudhi movement and I questioned Swami Shradhdhanand, who initiated the movement.

How can you purify a human being? What is the point of doing that? If you can convince other person about the good things of your approach, let him remain with his own name or whatever. Beard or cap or whatever, let it remain, let the person be a person.

And how come that you only purify the Muslims and Christians—why not Hindus? Most of us came from a Hindu background and are idol worshippers: why were we not purified? Shudhi movement should be ended in the Arya Samaj. Treat every one equally and move them toward truth and justice.

Has the majority of Arya Samaj adopted Hindutva? Or is there a strand that—like you—is leftist?

I would not say the majority, but the leaders and particularly these Punjabi well-to-do business-class people, they have gone closer to the BJP's and RSS's thinking. And that's another area where I question the Arya Samaj. We struggled and sacrificed so much in the freedom struggle. We were at the forefront with figures like Lala Lajpat Rai and Swami Shradhdhanand. From among the great martyrs, we have got Ram Prasad Bismil and Asfīqullah Khan, [the latter of whom] stayed in Arya Samaj Shahjahanpur. They were brothers and ate from the same plate and stayed in the same room—it's a great, inspiring story.

The British were very afraid of Arya Samaj. The British asked the Arya Samaj leaders to decide if it was a religious or political body. They drew a line. There was a well-to-do upper-class upper-caste segment of the Samaj and they were very soft towards the British.

Their philosophy was: keep doing your work, and be a bhakt of British. In their wisdom, these Arya Samaj members gave it in writing that they were a purely religious body.

That was the betrayal of the rank and file. They disowned Bhagat Singh when he became a revolutionary. He was the real spirit of the Arya Samaj. If only the Arya Samaj had followed on his path! Bhagat Singh was taking revenge for Lala Lajpat Rai's death from a lathi blow. Lajpat Rai had been exiled to Mandalay in Burma. When he came to Lahore, he was received by mammoth crowds. He was taken on an elephant on a procession, but as the procession passed before Anarkali Arya Samaj in Lahore, immediately the president and secretaries of Arya Samaj got together and said, *quickly cut his name from the register and close the gate. Otherwise he'll come and say I want to go to the Arya Samaj and we'll be identified and then the British will do so harm.*

So immediately they struck off his name with a red ink and they closed the gates. So that's another part of the Arya Samaj.

Then Arya Samaj started fashioning itself as religious institution with colleges, schools, etc. Even after Independence, because of these institutions, Arya Samaj stuck to this principal of being a religious body, dharmik sangathan. Mean while, the RSS, which was not at all into the freedom struggle—no one was arrested or jailed or sent to gallows—suddenly realised that now that India was free they should have a political wing. They used the premises of Arya Samaj Hanuman Road building. The Bhartiya Jan Sangh was established there in 1952.

The RSS takes Hindus as they are. They encourage obscurantism. They are promoting Kanwar Yatra, Amarnath Yatra, Vaishno Devi. The lowest common denominator was being catered to. It's doing a lot of disservice to the Hindu community. [The RSS] hasn't fought casteism; the Muslim we're fighting were our own Dalits.

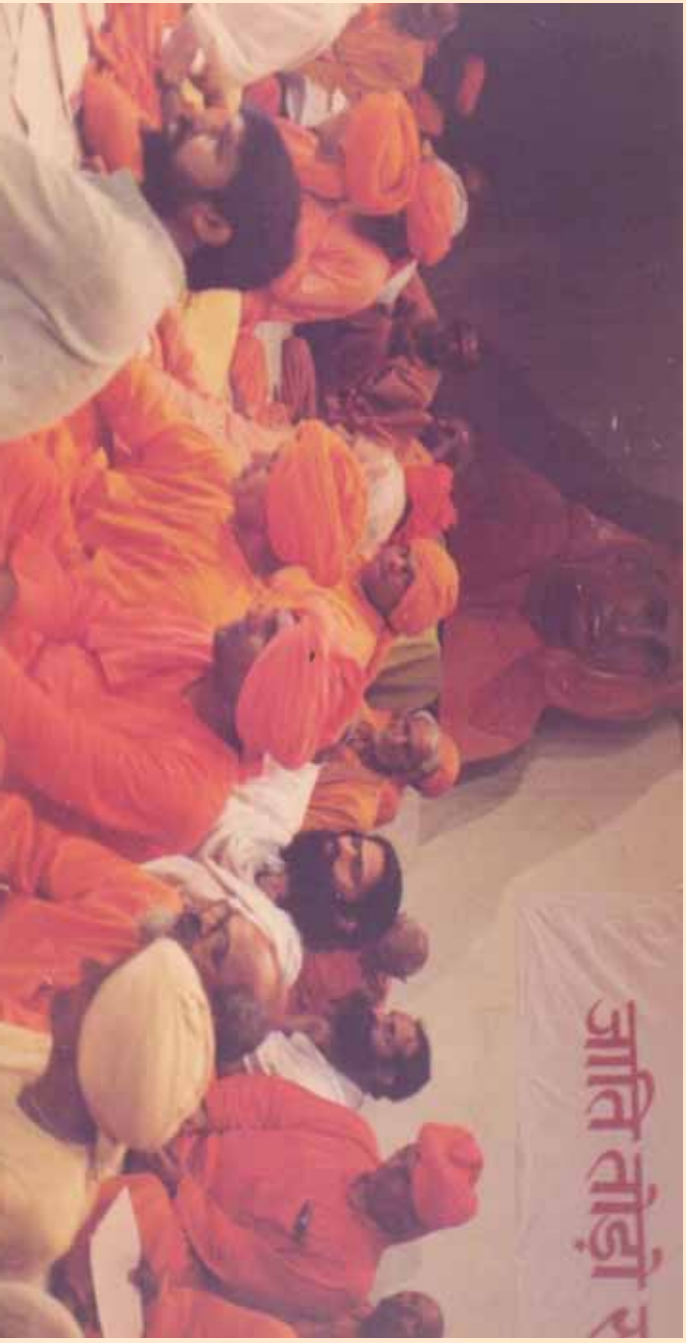
What is tribal ghar vapsi? You've cut them and thrown them away, now you want them to become Hindus. The RSS has never celebrated the tribals. Even after ghar vapsi they're saying, you can't go to our temples. They created swastika temple for them.

The Arya Samaj had a great opportunity to come up with a humanitarian movement. But three times they expelled me for life. It was being run by Jan Sangh types. They called me a jivan [a life long exile], but I survived.

(Karan Mahajan is the author most recently of The Association of Small Bombs..)

Swami Agnivesh stood for the Arya Samaj

- Pankaj Vohra



Internationally acclaimed for his contribution in freeing bonded labourers from the clutches of exploitative contractors, Swami Agnivesh, who passed away on Saturday, reflected the value system inculcated by the Arya Samaj to battledeep-rooted superstitious beliefs that have affected the Hindu society. He was a pioneer in spreading the message of truth in the deep interiors of Haryana, where unscrupulous elements had no qualms in enslaving the poor and needy to extract work for them, without paying any wages. Founder of the Bandhua Mukti Morcha, Agnivesh and Kailash Satyarthi, the latter was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize some years ago, worked together for the same cause to begin with. However, differences cropped up and they parted company. Media persons who covered events in the 1980s would recall that Agnivesh was the one who was better known for his crusade against human slavery, and carried out his task despite receiving threats to his life, from the criminal elements, who feared being exposed by his relentless pursuit.

A humble man, he lived in a modest accommodation at the Sardar Patel Bhawan complex on Jantar Mantar Road, which was once the Headquarters of the Congress and after its division in 1969 of Congress (O). He had been allotted the accommodation when the Janata Party was formed and the main building served as a meeting venue of senior leaders. Agnivesh was also elected to the Haryana Assembly and had a huge network in the state, even though he was not the son of the soil.

Haryana, a part of Punjab till 1966, was one region where the Arya Samaj movement remained strong. Some of the top Arya Samaj leaders belonged to undivided Punjab. They included Chaudhury Matu Ram, grandfather of former Haryana Chief Minister Bhupinder Singh Hooda, and a close associate of Lala Lajpat Rai and Ajit Singh, uncle of Shaheed Bhagat Singh.

The contribution of the Arya Samaj to the country's freedom struggle was second to none and its activists had the missionary zeal to realise the objectives of Swami Dayanand Saraswati, its founder. The Arya Samaj played the role of awakening the people by making them aware that superstitions and myths would lead them towards darkness. The teachings of Swami Dayanand were contained in the Satyarth Prakash and opposed any form of idol worship. Several Arya Samaj activists were supporters of the Congress and after the formation of the Bharatiya Jana Sangh were aligned to the saffron party. Swami Agnivesh, like his fellow travellers, opposed building of temples at enormous costs and professed simple living and high thinking. He did not endorse the BJP agenda, and was thus prevented from paying his tribute to former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, at the party Headquarters at Rouse Avenue. Agnivesh's desire was that people should live in harmony and 'Sanatani' thinking should not influence the political discourse. The Arya Samaj has been at the forefront of reforms and its followers would continue to abide by the Light of Truth. ●

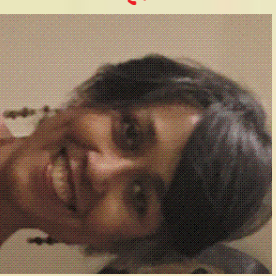
Remembering Swami Agnivesh, Who Worked Tirelessly To Reform Society

Like the Christian liberation theologians, for Swamiji, to be a true Arya Samaji meant to be a rationalist and to work for the poorest.

Swami Agnivesh's office—at the back of the old united Janata Dal office—was an open house. Centrally located, accessible to people who came



Nandini Sundar : Rights Society,
13th September, 2020



hall was over flowing with people. On the stage sat other swamis, while in the audience were women who had been part of the Beti Bachao Andolan encouraged by Swami Agnivesh, people who had accompanied him on a long march to Deorala to protest after the sati there, people who had benefitted from the Bandhua Mukti Morcha that he set up.

I knew, of course, of the Bandhua Mukti Morcha vs Union of India (1983) case directed at bonded labour in the brick kilns of Harayana and its subsequent iterations (for example, a 1997 case against the use of child labour in UP's carpet industry) as landmarks in the PIL field, but had no idea of all the things he had been involved in.

Moreover, what was surprising for me is that I knew almost no one there, suggesting that he lived in two almost radically different universes—the

to protest at Jantar Mantar, the office consisted in the main of a large table. Whenever I would drop in to consult Swami Agnivesh on some issue related to our case against Salwa Judum, there would be different people sitting with him.

But the wide circle of Swamiji's acquaintances only fully struck me when I attended his 80th birthday celebrations organised by the Arya Samaj at Pyare Lal Bhavan almost a year to this day. The



Supporters, relatives and followers of Swami Agnivesh during his funeral procession near Agni Yog Ashram in Gurugram district, September 12th, 2020



Supreme Court of India. Photo: The Wire

first, a world where his faith was of immense importance to him and provided the energy that helped him to fight against obscurantism in Hindu society. The second was the world of ‘secular activists’ where again, he took up a variety of causes—ranging from support for the Narmada Bachao Andolan to peace talks with the Maoists to support for the Anna Hazare led anti-corruption movement.

Like the Christian liberation theologists, for Swamiji, to be a true Arya Samaji meant to be a rationalist, to reform society and to work for the poorest; as with liberation theologists, his parent organisation was not in consonance with his radical views. He tried occasionally to get me interested in reading his books on spirituality, and multi-faith dialogue, but alas my interests are decidedly more materialist.

A year previously, in 2018, I had been part of another event with Swamiji, organised by a left women’s group in Hyderabad. There was a play about vigilante attacks on Muslims and Dalits for eating beef, where upon an actor playing Swami Agnivesh came on stage and delivered a rationalist sermon. When I asked the real Swami Agnivesh, who was sitting in the audience watching a play about himself, what he thought of his character, he replied smiling: “He was better than the original.”

The many attacks on Swamiji

Swamiji’s attendance at this seminar was itself a feat of stamina, as earlier that year, he had been brutally attacked in Jharkhand by a mob of the

Bharatiya Jan Yuva Morcha (BJYM) leading to damage to his liver, and eventually resulting in his death. For the first time, visiting him soon after the incident, I saw him confessing to weakness and pain. Even then, he had plans to organise youth nation wide into an anti-communal brigade.

However, this was not the first time Swami Agnivesh had been attacked under a BJP government by its supporters. In fact, my close acquaintance with him stems from 2011, when he was attacked by a Salwa Judum mob in Dornapal while on his way to deliver relief to the villages of Tadmetla, Morpalli and Timapuram which had been burnt by the police and SPOs. The mob was instigated by then superintendent of police (Dantewada), S.R.P. Kalluri. Swamiji readily agreed to file an affidavit on what happened in our ongoing case in the Supreme Court and this had considerable impact on the judgment by Justices B. Sudershan Reddy and S.S. Nijjar that came later that year, banning Salwa Judum.

In subsequent hearings also, Ashok Desai, the senior advocate arguing the case would ask Swami Agnivesh to come to court and he would always oblige if he was available. Going to the Supreme Court with Swamiji was an experience. While sitting outside the court room waiting for our turn, people would come and ask for his blessings.

It is worth reproducing extracts from the 2011 affidavit because it reveals how Swami Agnivesh was betrayed by Raman Singh, then chief minister of Chhattisgarh. Earlier that year in February 2011, Swami Agnivesh had got the Maoists to release policemen in Narayanpur, and he expected that

Raman Singh would enable him to continue with his humanitarian efforts in this case too. Swami Agnivesh was accompanied by two Art of Living representatives.

Swami Agnivesh wrote in his affidavit, on 26th March, 2011 :

"When we reached Dornapal, a motley crowd of 100-150 people led by some non-tribal looking, well built men, shouting filthy abuses in chaste Hindi, pulled all three of us out of the car. The driver was also threatened and the car tyres deflated. We had to face untold humiliation and unspeakable manhandling and pushing etc. This continued for nearly forty minutes or more. We wanted to hear them if they had any grievance but they were shouting: "where were you when 76 jawans were killed and when the Maoists perpetrate their acts of violence." To which I tried my level best to tell them that it was I who last year led a peace and justice march from Raipur to Dantewada, 5-10 May 2010, denouncing Maoist violence. We had paid flowing tributes to the soldiers who had been killed. But they were not in any mood to listen and kept shouting at us and pushing us. They pushed some women, who they said were widows, in front and forced them to fall upon us. In the process of one of the women being pushed at me, my turban was pulled off. The Art of Living Foundation people had a car load of clothes and other materials to be distributed to the victims of the burnt villages but the whole consignment was taken over by this crowd. Luckily our driver managed to pump air into the tyres. As we sat in the car to retreat, eggs were thrown on our car. The journalists accompanying us were also manhandled and badly treated and shouted at. The SDOP, Mr. Tarkeswar Patel tried to give us some protection but he was also pushed aside."

Undaunted, the next day Swamiji proceeded again, this time on the explicit assurance of Raman Singh.

"When we reached close to Dornapal naka we saw trucks and long route buses stranded and a huge menacing crowd assembled there. We immediately contacted ASP Marawi and told him to retreat because we sensed trouble to which he said, no, everything will be fine. In his over-confidence, he got down from his vehicle and approached the crowd to negotiate safe passage. But instead he too was pushed down by the slogan shouting marauding mob who then swooped on us from all sides and surrounded our car with sticks. This time the ASP had provided us with his personal vehicle, a brand new Scorpio. The crowd wanted to pull us out and lynch us, failing which they were also determined to set the vehicle on fire. They

started pelting the car with huge rocks weighing around 1 kg, on all sides, and all the window panes shattered to pieces. The rocks started hitting us. The driver was also pulled out and beaten. One big rock hit me on the back of my head, and I was saved only because of my turban. Rishi Milind was saved because he took the blow on his right elbow, which was injured, but it saved him from brain injury on his right side. All this happened between 4.45 and 5.00 pm. The 15-20 security men who had accompanied us (not 100-150 as promised by the Chief Minister) stood by silently. There is a CRPF camp right there and they also did nothing. The journalists with us were also being attacked. Then the driver got into the vehicle again and pulled us out of that murderous attack. With great difficulty he manoeuvred the car around and drove back. The Salwa Judum/SPOs chased us for around 15 km on the road back."

Swami Agnivesh speaking to reporters outside the Supreme Court after decriminalisation of Section 377. Photo: Anoo Bhuyan/The Wire

Continued struggle for peace

A lesser man than Swami Agnivesh—who was 72 at this time—would have gone quiet after such a violent attack. Instead, he continued to struggle for peace in Chhattisgarh and for justice for the villagers of Tadmetla. In 2011, the Supreme Court ordered the CBI to conduct an enquiry into the attack on the villages and on Swami Agnivesh. Till date, that enquiry is incomplete and although the CBI charged some men with the attack on Swamiji, nothing happened beyond that initial weak chargesheet and nobody has been punished. Reading former CBI director Nageswar Rao's distasteful tweets on Swami Agnivesh, it is little surprise that the CBI submissions in court were so weak despite the detailed evidence their officers on the ground collected.

As mentioned in his affidavit in 2010, Swami Agnivesh had been involved in a peace march to Dantewada and also in attempting to broker peace talks between the government and Maoists. Top Maoist Azad was carrying a letter to his comrades from the home minister through Swami Agnivesh when he was killed in an 'encounter'. Swami Agnivesh continued to blame himself for the killing, feeling he was used as a pawn by the government. In 2014, he travelled to Andhra Pradesh to depose in the case.

Whenever Swamiji called me, he would start by saying, 'Namaste professor Nandini Sundar', and end with 'Jai Ho'. Jai Ho, Swamiji—you will always be an inspiration, wherever you are.

Nandini Sundar is a Delhi-based sociologist.

ORGANISED RELIGION MAKES SLAVES OF MEN:

AGNIVESH IN ONE OF HIS FINAL INTERVIEWS

27th September 2020 Wolfgang Rattay/REUTERS

- SOUMYA SHANKAR

On 11th September, Agnivesh, a swami in the Arya Samaj, died at the age of 80. Agnivesh donned many hats in his lifetime—he was a lecturer, a social activist and a samnyasi. In 1981, he founded the Bandhwa Mukti

the powerful winter winds that blew through open fields in Haryana, nor any cooling for the sweltering hot months. *Agnivesh described his multi-faceted life, and elaborated on his thoughts on spirituality, god, politics and death.*



Swami Agnivesh with the then Chief Minister of West Bengal

organisation. The monk also played crucial roles in Indian politics, including that of an education minister in Haryana and a mediator for many high-profile political disputes. He regularly participated in protests in Delhi, and was often the only one dressed in saffron robes.

S o u m y a Shankar: Many spiritual leaders across the world—especially those coming from very conservative milieus - risk their lives for pursuing humanitarian work in order to transform society. What was your early life like and what inspired you to go on this path?

In November last year, the journalist Soumya Shankar met Agnivesh for the University of Southern California's Spiritual Exemplars project. At the time, the monk had convened a gathering at Agniyog, an ashram in rural Gurgaon, in Haryana, where he spent several days to escape Delhi's polluted air. The attendees included around twenty activists who worked for a range of causes, a fellow monk, some of Agnivesh's Arya Samaj followers, women activists of the Beti Bachao Andolan whom he had trained, and locals from nearby areas. The retinue had come together at the behest and guidance of Agnivesh to discuss how to achieve world peace by establishing a world government.

Agnivesh and Shankar spoke at length on this occasion, and their conversation appears to be his final in-depth interview. They spoke in his dwelling at the ashram, which was empty apart from a few basic items—a desk, a chair, a lamp, some clothes and papers strewn around, a few books and a charger—and infused with the fragrance of fruits. There was no heating for

Agnivesh: We all get born into a religion which is ritualistic, dogmatic, superstition mongering, miracle mongering. I was born into a Brahmin family of Andhra Pradesh and I used to follow my mother and father, who had set up a room for [idols of] gods and goddesses in the house when I was little. So as a child, I would worship all gods and goddesses, believe in all rituals and stories, which were full of superstitions. When I went to Calcutta for college education, I came to know of this powerful movement called Arya Samaj, which opened my eyes to the Vedas and Upanishads [scriptures in Hinduism]. These spiritual treasures—very universal, very transformative and yet, shut out from us.

That started the process of my inner evolution way back in 1956-1957. I was 17 years old. I completed my college and university education in 1963—master of commerce and bachelor of law. Very surprisingly, I received an appointment letter to teach in the prestigious St. Xavier's college the very day I had written my final examination paper. That was the start of my new thinking and a new way of life. Before that, I was very critical of Christian missionaries, I would accuse them of trying to convert our poor tribes and others, and maybe instigate an "Isaistan" [a Christian state] on the lines of Pakistan, which is an Islamic state.

I used to campaign with an Arya Samaj activist against Christian missionaries, and yet I was working with a prestigious Jesuit missionary college. I taught there for five years and during the same time, I also practiced law in Calcutta High Court under Sabyasachi Mukharji, a senior lawyer who subsequently became the chief justice of India. I was also doing some research for the World Bank and the Planning Commission of India under a professor from Harvard University. He was very impressed with my work and wanted me to accompany him back to the United States and said he would get me the job of a research assistant or assistant professor there. I, too, was very keen to go to the U.S.

Around that time, I had the occasion to peep into the rooms of those Christian missionary Jesuit professors who were living in the same college building, in one corner on the fifth floor. We were not supposed to visit that area, but I just managed to sneak into those rooms and see their simple lifestyles.

I asked myself a question. “They have left the comforts of their country—many of them were from Netherlands, Belgium et cetera—and working here in India, in the dust and pollution, whereas I am thinking if I should leave this country and lead a good comfortable life abroad.”

I felt challenged. “Why are they doing it? Leaving their comfort and living here? Because they have a mission.” I asked myself, “What’s your mission?” My name at that time was Professor VSK Rao. I said even though I may not be a missionary, I must have a mission! I decided to stay back in India.

SS: Did you then take sanyasa, the renunciation of material life to pursue spiritual goals?

A: Not that time. I was busy teaching and having a good life there in St Xavier’s college. Later on, I was asked to teach in my alma mater, Law College, Calcutta University. In early 1967, a movement started in a small village north of Calcutta called Naxalbari and the young people there took up arms. They would kill whoever they thought to be their “class enemy” and distribute the land among the landless. They became popular and their stories would be published in newspapers.

SS: So, you were attracted to communism?

A: Not communism or Maoism, but I thought a real revolution is coming, where the poorest of the poor, the landless, were going to be given land rights. This is the most urgent reform that should have happened immediately after Independence.

I had read about Charu Mazumdar, Jungle Santhal, Kanu Sanyal—all of these great legendary Naxal leaders. I was filled with those ideas, but the slogans they wrote on the walls of Calcutta would invariably say things like, “Revolution grows from the barrel of a gun” and “Chairman Mao is our Chairman.” Bright students from Presidency College, which has now become a university, Scottish Church College and also St. Xavier’s joined them. Some professors left their jobs and joined the Naxal movement. During that time, Siddhartha Shankar Ray was the chief minister of West Bengal. He would catch hold of these boys and girls and shoot them point blank, declaring they’ve been shot in a police encounter. Thousands were done to death, brutally, and yet, more and more people were coming out and fighting this unjust economic order.

SS: Did you join them?

A: No. I asked myself, “Can I wield a gun? Can I kill anybody in the name of ‘class enemy?’ I can’t.” It was beyond me, unthinkable! “What should I do? Just keep quiet? I don’t know!”

I felt challenged. “These young boys can sacrifice their lives to bring about change in society. If I don’t believe in wielding a gun, I should be doing something else which is equally dedicated.” I decided I must leave my comfortable job, go to the poorest of the poor and work among them. It was around that time I met a young man from Gurukul Jhajjar in Haryana [a residential Arya Samaj school] named Indradev Medharthi. Subsequently, we both took sanyas—he became Swami Indraves and I became Agnivash.

SS: And you both took sanyasa under a guru?

A: Yes, Ved Muni Parivrajak—he was a great scholar of the Vedas who had translated the Yiman Shastra—an ancient treatise about aerodynamics et cetera. I spent the first two years as a neshitik bhramacharya—between 1968 and 1970, I was a celibate and that part of my life was far more austere and rigorous.

SS: More austere than now?

A: Yes, far more. I was sleeping on the floor, not consuming salt or chilli, walking barefoot all the time, with just having two pairs of clothes—one to wash and spread, to lie down and another to wear. I was wearing nothing stitched—just two robes. I had a long braid like Dakshin Brahmins [South Indian Brahmins] a mekhla [a type of shawl] and a janeu [a sacred thread worn by upper-caste Hindu men].

When I moved forward I realised that organised religion and institutionalised religion are the biggest hindrances because they make slaves of men and leave little room for independent thinking. If they allowed independent thinking, no one would like to be bound, they would like to be free.

SS: Are you talking about being bound in society or being trapped in the body? What is your idea of god or the universal truth?

A: For those who live in society and practice organised religion, they will be communal, dogmatic and conservatism. This is because religion stands on these pillars—all religions include worship of stones, idols or people. You'll never have the freedom to reflect on principles; there's no space to evolve or transform. However, in all these religions, the core values are very universal, which we call spiritual core values. If we go into the Vedas, there is nothing ritualistic, nothing dogmatic.

The way I understand god is like a cosmic energy of love, trust, compassion and justice—that is what I understand to be the most liberating force of humanity and if we follow this, it will be beneficial for us. This is essentially a spiritual concept and has nothing to do with institutionalised religion—neither Hinduism nor Islam. Spirituality by definition is very subversive because it is the driving force against the status quo. All the prophets were spiritual—all their teachings were converted into rituals by their followers.

SS: Can you expand a bit on that?

A: The real seekers were the prophets, not priests. The priest is a follower and the prophet is a rebel and revolutionary. That's what attracted me to this path—the prophet and the revolutionary character. Even if they disown god, they won't disown truth or justice and when we take this forward we are inspired to do this kind of work, because to relate to god you have to be truthful, just and compassionate.

SS: Did you see yourself as truthful and just or were you desirous of developing these qualities in you?

A: It is a proactive concept. Not just proactive truthfulness and justice, you have to take on all those dark forces of untruth, bondage, tyranny and injustice simultaneously as you grow more and more fire within you—the divine fire of burning truth. You have to see if untruth is rising around you, and understand that injustice anywhere is injustice everywhere. You should feel challenged. If you are not feeling challenged there is something very artificial about you and your spirituality.

SS: Your spiritual image is always tempered by your participation in Indian political life. In many ways, you have gone against the norms of the commune, the Arya Samaj, to do what you think is correct. Do you consider the individual's potential to be greater than the organisation's potential?

A: There is a dialectical relationship between the individual and the organisation. The more you are inclined towards organisation, the less you have energy for truth and radical views. The more you are individual, the less you are effective in terms of delivering [laughs]. You stay on your own, and you can daydream all you want, but your impact will not be much as an individual. For me, I will only tell the truth, I don't care about anything else.

SS: So, how do you handle this? Have you found a way to balance or escape this dialectic?

A: The quest is still on. But I participate in politics—I am not part of party politics, still my views are very clear. I speak openly about economic and political issues. Somewhere it pinches those who are in power today, so they organise attacks on me. I don't have any personal differences with anybody, but they can't tolerate my views. When I criticise their policies, they attack me personally to silence me.

SS: As a monk, do you follow any spiritual practices, meditation or rituals?

A: There is nothing rigid I do daily. Even in meditation, I'm not very rigid. I mix some different techniques. I like vipassana [meditation involving concentration on the body] because it is scientific, but I combine that with the concept of god emanating from the Vedas. This, I picked up in Arya Samaj. Whenever I pick up a good practice, wherever it may be from—Islam, Christianity—I incorporate it into my own practice.

But just as much as I am influenced by all this, I am influenced by Karl Marx too: Get to the root—why are the poor, so? You can't solve this with charity. Change the structure and production relationships.

There should be no poverty—this is a very good thought—and religions don't have these thoughts. Religions have a charity-based approach—giving donations, alms et cetera. On this, I often quote a Latin American Bishop, Hélder Câmara, who famously said, “When I give bread to the poor, they call me a saint, but when I ask why the poor do not have bread they call me a communist.” A communist is one who wants structural change.

SS: So you identify with communism?

A: In that sense, of course, yes.

SS: How does your social work affect your spiritual pursuit?

A: It reinforces it—spirituality and meditation are good, but it must have an expression in the world. Spirituality is as much inwardly as worldly. Religions are other-worldly—this will happen after you die, that will happen. Don't bother about what happens once you die, you have to do in this world what you must. If you consider yourself spiritually evolved and are committed to justice, to the poorest of the poor, you're on the right path. If your spirituality doesn't imbibe this and you're just sitting and meditating then I call those people new-age types. They are worthless people.

SS: You follow eclectic practices, a mix of different spiritual practices and you are even influenced by Marx. Why do you then wear saffron, a popular colour of Hindu seers, or affix the title Swami to your name?

A: My Vedic philosophy, or whatever you may call it, is that the most liberated person is a sannyasi. He need not do any havan, rituals or meditation or wear any of these clothes. If I have ever needed to change my clothes, I have done so without a second thought.

SS: Have you ever changed out of these clothes?

A: Yes, I had gone to the Philippines to meet with insurgents fighting Ferdinand Marcos [who served as president from 1965 to 1986]. When I reached Mindanao island, our friends had come to pick us up in an open jeep. After we drove for a while, a person told me I was too conspicuous because of how I dressed. I told them, "No problem, give me ten minutes and a pair of jeans and T-shirt and I will change into that." I spent the next five—seven days like that.

SS: Were the negotiations with the insurgents successful?

A: No, we just wanted to meet those people and see what was their inspiration, why they had taken up arms to fight. When I was returning, they gave me a floral greeting card which said, "Happy are those who dream dreams and are prepared to pay the price to make them come true." That was a prized possession for me. It's on my table in Delhi.

SS: Will you always wear the saffron clothes of a Hindu seer? Why do you think this is important?

A: The *vastra* [clothes] signify the colour of the flame. That's how I took this name Agnivesh [which means an embodiment of fire]. Fire is a symbol that inspires me—

it's purifying. I feel a person should become a sannyasi if he can, without attachment. Speaking truth to power should be his or her most important vocation—without worrying about which country you are in.

I go to Pakistan in these clothes—I roam alone in Lahore, Karachi, Islamabad. Muslim brothers see me with affection, take me home and feed me vegetarian food. If I eat or drink juice at a shop, they don't take money from me—I find this very surprising.

SS: Your detractors have accused you of wearing these robes for political reasons.

A: No, no, no—on the contrary, it becomes a liability sometimes, I can't join the Congress Party. They won't take me in because of this.

SS: You also do a lot of political and social activism, which is dangerous.

A: I don't put my life at risk on purpose. There is a threat to my life in the process of doing my work.

SS: But your life has been in danger many times. You have said you were attacked by right-wing Hindu mobs in Jharkhand. With reference to the Jharkhand attack, you were accused of not being a true Hindu, of spreading Naxalism and Maoism in the robes of a Hindu monk.

A: I've been attacked many times. I can't tell if it will happen again. It's not something I wish for and it may happen again. I'm not seeking any martyrdom. I'm very much against Mahatma Gandhi's pursuit of martyrdom. Gandhiji wanted to be a martyr, and other big revolutionaries wanted to embrace martyrdom. I want to live as long as possible, healthy and in working condition—that's my wish, for a hundred years or even more. At the same time, my primary duty is to speak and act on truth and challenge the forces of untruth. That, on its own, is subversive and a little dangerous. And the danger is it can bring unprovoked attacks on you.

SS: Do you feel fearful of the mobs in India now?

A: No, not at all. I feel good about the fact that they are at least recognising me—that I am a voice to reckon with. Otherwise, why would they need to react? I am a threat because I am showing them a mirror. I am telling them, "The religion or gods of Hinduism that you are talking about is not this; you are perverting and corrupting it. You are bringing shame on Hinduism."

For them, Hinduism and Hindutva are the same thing. We try to separate the two. But the crux of the matter is extremism exists in all religions—Islam, Hinduism and even Marxism. That extremism takes you away from the truth and spoils it, making it violence-prone, hate-

prone and this should not happen. If you disagree with me or someone else, there is a way to deal with it, and that is through dialogue. Loving and friendly dialogue should be the only way to resolve all differences in the world—all, political or any other. And in today's age when it is so easy with most countries having parliamentary democracies, debates, dialogues, television, internet and social media, why should we use force?

SS: Your insistence on dialogue over force has also been used against you by your detractors. For instance, during the India Against Corruption movement, you have been known as a peace negotiator between two parties; same with the often violent Naxal movement. People said you were doing injustice to the social movements by negotiating with political parties.

A: Yes, the role of a negotiator can always be wrongly presented. That threat is inherent and I was a victim of that. The first time when I was negotiating with Maoists, the chief negotiator from their side, Rajkumar Azad, was gunned down brutally [in 2010]. The government claimed it was an encounter, but I could prove it was a fake encounter. And yet, the government had its own way—that was a great shock for me. Secondly, during the India Against Corruption movement, at every stage, I sought permission from Anna [Hazare], Arvind Kejriwal and everybody, and I went to talk to the Congress ministers—Kapil Sibal, Salman Khurshid and others.

SS: Why did you think it was necessary to talk to them? The movement leaders were against it, right?

A: No, the movement was not against the government, it was against corruption—it was “India Against Corruption,” not “India Against Congress.” It later started taking the shape of India against Congress. I saw it up close—Kejriwal's own wish was to bring down the Congress government. I said to him, “You work is to bring the Jan Lokpal Bill, because you want to eliminate corruption. We should join hands with Congress and in case Congress is also ready to meet us midway, we should welcome it. If we call out one or two positives, that's alright.” He said “It's all wrong.” He was outrightly against it. Even when I tried to negotiate with the Congress, every morning IAC people would come up with a new issue and they would nudge me to take up with the party and it would be accepted.

I told Congress members something they wanted to hear: “The credit will go to the Congress Government, and ultimately the bill will be brought in by you.” They

said, “We will bring it in, but we will not involve civil society members in it.” I asked why and they said, “It has never happened that civil society has engaged with the drafting process.” I told them, “Sonia Gandhi has a National Advisory Council with representatives from civil society—Aruna Roy, Jean Drèze, Harsh Mander. You already have a body that is [involved in] drafting bills like Right to Information, Right to Education, then where is the problem?” Finally, they agreed.

SS: Then, how did you fall out with the IAC movement?

A: Devious elements in these groups got overwhelmed by one who was trying to negotiate truthfully—with one who was trying to talk about your good qualities and the other party's good qualities to bring both closer. But these devious elements have other motives—the [Congress] thought Delhi was going to turn into Tahrir Square and the government will collapse. I said that was a dictator for 39 years and it was time for his downfall, so the people revolted and the government collapsed.

No government can collapse in India because of a social movement—irrespective of however good or bad it may be. This I told them very clearly.

SS: How did this impact your politics?

A: I've been away from electoral politics for quite some time. I don't want to be a part of electoral politics now, because I feel no party or leader will understand my truthful words. Janata Party was the first party I had to leave, even though I was like Chandra Shekharji's right hand. But he also asked me to leave because I would only tell the truth and nothing else.

I stood against him for the position of party president, in the party convention in Pune, at Parandwadi, in 1986. He had announced, “I have been president for ten years now I won't stand for election”—I won't go into too much detail. Then, he announced that he would stand for election yet again, so I stood against him and got a few votes but it damaged his image. Then he orchestrated an attack on me, had my office vandalised.

SS: So, like you hinted, you entered politics with a lot of idealism. When did your idealism start to fade?

A: I still believe idealism is very important. Without idealism, there is no point to life or living.

SS: But it is also a very radical thought when you talk about peace negotiations with the enemy—it requires a lot of flexibility, which is not too idealistic or stoic.

A: It's not rigid, there is flexibility. I would like work to be pursued with an idealistic fervour, that's when you progress and evolve—step by step. Or you get sucked into the corrupt system. You may reach a high position, but your credibility will always be questioned. So, a lot of people leave it from the start, and Gandhiji [got disillusioned] and left after the freedom struggle—I don't feel that is correct, he should have gone into electoral politics. Assert yourself, if you are pushed out later—that's different.

SS: Why did you leave electoral politics?

A: I joined politics and left several times.

SS: Electoral politics isn't completely out of the picture for you?

A: No.

SS: You can join electoral politics again?

A: Yes, anytime, but no one is willing to call me—I have tried many times. Right now, Congress is in such a bad shape; I sent many feelers through several responsible people that that I'm interested in joining politics. No one is ready.

SS: Do you feel you have burnt all your bridges?

A: No, I haven't burnt any bridges. They feel I am too subversive so they consider me a threat. I said I can accommodate to some extent but I will always remain honest. I will call a spade a spade. I will do a new beginning. They don't like that.

SS: Because politics gives greater importance to institutions over individualists?

A: That the truth, that's why political parties are failing, and so are religions. All organised institutions in the world are going against their constitutional values.

SS: You have often trumped the organisations that you have been associated with—particularly the Arya Samaj. And yet, no living leader of the Arya Samaj is as well known...

A: I have been telling these people that you need to bring everyone close to the real values of these organisations and liberate yourself from dogmatism.

SS: So, dogmatism still exists in the Arya Samaj?

A: Yes, it exists. It used to be considered a forum for free thinkers. But there's so much dogmatism now. One of the golden principles of the Arya Samaj's ten principles is the fourth one—always be ready to accept the truth and forsake untruth. Yet, that spirit is completely

gone from the institution, because they have to look after property, curry favours with the government.

SS: Did you ever think of starting your own organisation?

A: If I form my own organisation, I will balance it like this ashram here. I'm not a trustee in this ashram, I am nobody here, but I often come and go and people respect me. The flat I'm living in is not my own.

SS: You don't own anything?

A: No, nothing. Not a single inch of property. I have very little money in the bank—my pension and the money I receive for articles I write. Every few months, I transfer it to the Bonded Labor Liberation Fund.

SS: Why not start a trust in your name?

A: This practice of starting things in your name is wrong. That's just personality or hero worship. That's the biggest problem with this country—that we keep people on such a high pedestal—it's like worshipping god. Then, they fail to become role models.

SS: The people who came to see you today, don't they consider you to be a role model?

A: If they consider me a role model, that's fine. But they shouldn't put me on a pedestal or make me a guru. I don't let people to touch my feet or give me flowers and there are more such things that I don't like to encourage gurunam [the realm of gurus]. I will sit with everyone else, eat with everyone else. It shouldn't look like I am different from others because I wear saffron.

SS: Do you find the path you have chosen to be difficult?

Do you miss, for instance, having a family?

A: No, I have never felt lonely, I meet people frequently.

SS: So, what are the downsides of living this life?

A: Sometimes, I feel, who will take my work forward with as much force? I am not completely sure about that. Sometimes I search for people who can take this forward, yes. But I keep on living, if I have to find someone to take it forward, I will.

SS: Do you feel if you have a lineage your work would be taken forward?

A: No, I have seen that no prophet's own children have truly taken their work forward. No one has. I gave deeksha, [religious consecration] to two people and then dropped it. I'm not their guru. I don't believe in any kind of parampara [tradition].

SS: What is your ultimate goal socially in this lifetime?

A: I believe that without setting a goal and with my daily evolution, I should keep living my authentic self. Whatever I consider to be the truth, I should live those values. Universal ideals like Vasudev Kutumbakam [the world is a family]—a world parliament and constitution and a world government is a big goal. Until then, these 193 sovereign nations will keep destroying the world. And the United Nations won't be able to meet its goals. The UN Charter for Human Rights won't be translated into reality. I wish that there be one parliament, one government and everyone gets equal rights. Planet earth should be home for all people equally. I am not sure we can accomplish that goal in this lifetime, but we will take a few steps in that direction.

SS: What would you consider your greatest achievement? Are you satisfied with all that you have accomplished?

A: This is a very difficult question. My belief is: I should live a humble and spontaneous life. Not to be too calculated and result driven, but I have thought a lot about what I will leave for posterity.

If I consider myself as someone great that everyone remembers, discusses or praises, and I won't be around, what do I stand to gain? [Laughs.] I will be passing by wherever I will be praised, and I will listen to what people have to say as a stranger, or maybe as a cat or dog or a bird on a tree.

SS: So you believe in reincarnation?

A: Yes, I do. I don't know where or what I will be. I have incarnated in the past and will be reincarnated again.

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Date Saturday 19th September 2020!
agnivesh70@gmail.com , Cc Dinesh :
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स्वामी अग्निवेश जी का असामयिक निधन , इस समाज के लिए एक आघात के सामान है। भारतीय समाज के लिए यह एक गहरी क्षति है जिसकी पूर्ति असंभव है। स्वामी जी के द्वारा किये गये कार्य सर्वविदित है। उन महान विभूति को किन शब्दों में श्रद्धांजलि करनी चाहिए यह एक कठिन कार्य है। स्वामी जी शरीर से अवश्य दूर हो गए है परन्तु उनके आदर्श ,विचार और उनके द्वारा समाज के लिए किये गये कार्यों के द्वारा , वो सदैव हमारा और इस समाज का मार्गदर्शन करते रहेंगे।

ईश्वर उनकी आत्मा को शान्ति प्रदान करे ।

स्वामी जी को नम आँखों द्वारा भावभीनी श्रद्धांजलि

SEEMA MUSTAFA
The Swami with a Mission

Saturday September 12th

Eight one year old Swami Agnivesh is no more. He was struggling to live for two years now, even since he was brutally attacked by a right wing mob in Jharkhand because of which his liver was damaged. Swami who would call if he did not hear from us for a while, or received calls with a warm greeting, admitted in these years for the first time that his condition was not good. The assault had shaken him mentally, and damaged him physically to a point from which he could not recover. And despite his and the doctors best efforts he passed away at the Institute of Liver and Biliary Sciences.

-SAUMYA VARMA & MANISHA SHASTRI

ITCO DELHI

indiatibet7@gmail.com , Date: Sat, 19th Sep, 2020,
Subject: Tribute message to late Sh. Swami Agnivesh
To: Swami Agnivesh <agnivesh70@gmail.com>

Respected Swami Arjavesh and
Prof. Vithal Rao Arya,

We are deeply saddened to hear the demise of late Shri. Swami Agnivesh ji, His altruistic service to this Great Nation will always be indebted. His love and affection to the people of various social backgrounds taught us to be genuine human being. We are very grateful for his fight against Child labor, sati and untouchability. We will always keep him in our prayers!

Kindly find herewith the video message attached with this mail. With Prayer

INDIA TIBET COORDINATION OFFICE (ITCO)
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Swami Agnivesh: Reflections and Memories Faith in Action

By: Katherine Marshall September 14, 2020



What words and what examples come to mind when asked to highlight Swami Agnivesh's example for the upcoming generation? For those who must take this extraordinary moment when the COVID-19 emergency has thrown so many accepted norms and normal patterns into questions, what can they learn from this remarkable, truly unique force of nature?

For me, he exemplifies a quality we devoutly wish for and need to see in spiritual and religious leaders: the courage to speak truth to power. Often uncomfortable truths. Spoken with clarity, no beating around the bush or mincing words. That truth-telling needs a kind of "no holds barred" courage and a commitment to truth. And to whomever is in power, whether they want to hear it or not. This is an example that is sorely needed today, when there is far too little truth and far too little courage. This quality of Swami Agnivesh and the example he sets go alongside a constant compass that is focused on those who suffer and who are vulnerable. He speaks and acts from a deeply considered commitment to justice and fairness.

I met Swami Agnivesh not long after being tapped by World Bank President James Wolfensohn (in 2000) to translate an idea and ideal of dialogue between religious

and secular leaders committed to development into reality. That challenge initially focused on two forms: first, meetings that brought together people from the two groups, and second, looking beyond warm statements that included an undue dose of platitudes to understand better the reasons for discord and, still more, hostility and indifference. I have thus had the privilege of meeting Swami Agnivesh often, in very different settings, indifferent corners of the world. We have also corresponded and spoken on other occasions. We shared a panel discussion on the role of faith in the Asia Pacific region in early July this year, as part of the United Nations High Level Political Forum.

Two interviews that I did with him and wrote up explored how he came to his sui generis role: spiritual leader ready to contest and fight, skeptic about organized religious bodies but always willing to listen, dreamer of a better world. These are part of a collection on Georgetown University's Berkeley Center website. They highlight an unusual journey and his robust commitment to truth and justice.

An avalanche of memories of the striking figure who took on topics ranging from hunger to HIV/AIDS to slavery should make a book. I treasure the memories and the orange headpiece that he put on my head twice during meetings, a testimony to a special friendship.

Three moments I was part of illustrate Swami Agnivesh's witness and his lived example.

During a visit to India, Swamiji invited me to visit a site where bonded laborers—children for the most part—had been freed. They had been enslaved as brick makers. The visit involved an over night train trip and a public gathering marking the events. At each point as people approached and wanted to bow to the Swami, he resisted. People are equal and traditional obeisance to religious figures is inappropriate, he said. He inspired a crowd gathered to celebrate but also spoke to individuals about their fears and hopes for the future.

At a meeting in Indonesia in 2003 to reflect on a draft Universal Declaration of Human Responsibilities,

a notable group was assembled, many former heads of state and learned figures. Balancing rights and responsibilities was the topic of the day. It was the eve of the invasion of Iraq and many expressed their doubts about the wisdom of what seemed the inevitable impending events. Swami Agnivesh suggested that the group move, one and all, to Iraq to serve as a human shield. I wish I had more than a mental image of the faces of his audience. Needless to say, there was no mass move towards Iraq but the challenge was clear: One should be willing to act on one's words and beliefs.

In Rome, Pope Francis visited the World Food Programme headquarters there to support global efforts to end hunger, which is the thrust of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 2: zero hunger. In an interfaith discussion the day before, Swami Agnivesh spoke forcefully and with no political correctness about the underlying injustices that cause hunger. He also called for action beyond words. His few words to Pope Francis conveyed the same sense of urgency, care, and commitment to and belief in the common purpose that was the essence of the event.

The palette of Swami Agnivesh's life work is filled with intersecting colors and textures, reflecting vividly the deeply inter connected aspects of both justice and cruel wrongs. His work to fight modern slavery translates to commitments to rights of children, women, class, and castes. His commitment to education reflects a deep faith in the potential of humanity, given the chance. His interest in HIV/AIDS leaves a side causes of disunity and focuses on compassion and action. Despite some well-founded doubts about the benefits of inter religious dialogue events where many disagreements and tensions remain masked, Swami Agnivesh has never hesitated to engage with a spirit of moving the dialogue forward.

The complex threads of religious roles in conflict, in India and elsewhere, have drawn Swami Agnivesh into active roles in conflict mediation and into courageous stances calling for truth and justice. His courage and willingness to take on powerful interests are noteworthy, even notorious. When the voice of the voiceless and their welfare is at stake, it is the time to act.

That's central to the legacy and example: Not only must a true leader speak truth to power, they must also work constantly to carry ideals into action.

<https://berkeleycenter.georgetown.edu/interviews/a-discussion-with-swami-agnivesh-south-and-central-asia> A Discussion with Swami Agnivesh (South and Central Asia)



Background: This discussion preceded the January 2011 consultation on faith and development in South and Central Asia in Dhaka, Bangladesh. The interview supplements a conversation in December 2008; it was by video conference between Katherine Marshall and Michael Bodakowski, and Swami Agnivesh followed up during the Dhaka consultation and by email. Swami Agnivesh discusses his involvement in peace processes in India, with the Maoists and in Kashmir; his mediation efforts with the Maoists were ongoing at the time of the interview. Agnivesh highlights the importance of solidarity among religions, including addressing conflicts and fighting corruption, and emphasizes the Parliament of All the Religions and their minimum common program. Religious leaders/institutions, he says, have responsibility to play leading roles on social issues. He underlines gender issues in South Asia, expressing cautious optimism at recent progress in changing both laws and practical realities.

“You are deeply involved now in trying to resolve conflicts, especially with the Maoists and in Kashmir. Religious roles in conflict resolution, actual and potential, are an important focus of our consultation. What is happening now and what do you conclude about religious involvement in conflicts and peace building?”

“Regarding the Maoists, the most recent peace process was initiated on May 5th, 2010 with a march from Raipur to Dantewada. The march was a symbol of solidarity towards India's 100 million Tribal people who

have been severely exploited, first by theerst while British rulers and later after independence by our own rulers. The Peace and Justice March, with veteran Ghandian social and peace activists, was against violence, both by the Maoists and by the state. The Maoists had killed 76 paramilitary personnel in Dantewada on April 6th, 2010. Our march was a call for dialogue instead of violence and counter violence. It was at this point, that I was asked by the Home Minister and the Central Government to initiate a search for peace withthe Maoists. I had been making progress, but then, one of the maininterlocutors for the Maoists (Azad), was brutally gunned down by the police. That completely derailed the entire process.

When that happened, I began to demand an inquiry into the death, which I repeated again and again. I met India's prime minister, and he himself agreed that an inquiry was necessary, and promised that he would see that it happened. He promised me action within five days; it is now five months and no word.

"I did not know what else to do to rectify the situation. Finally, I decided to go to the Supreme Court of India and demand/request a judicial inquiry. The Supreme Court, after listening to me and my petition, might agree. This could, just in itself, help to create confidence among the Maoists, who have already expressed their view, that as soon as an announcement is made by the Government or the Supreme Court, they will come forth to the negotiating table. They want long term peace with a cease fire for a minimum of six to nine months.

I think that once the inquiry is announced, the peace process will resume. I have made a petition to the Supreme Court to keep the process moving forward

"When did you file the petition with the Supreme Court
"I filed it on the fourteenth of January. The Supreme Court has since then served a notice to government of India and the state of Andhra Pradesh saying "The Republic of India cannot be allowed to kill its own children" and has fixed March 14th for first hearing.

"The Maoists are claiming police brutality, and the police are also claiming that they are killing the Maoists and have suffered deaths in their ranks. On both sides, the violence goes on. The use of guns is not going to solve the issue. Both sides need to come to dialogue, a point that both sides themselves continue to say is necessary and important, but they have not been able to reach that point or resolve the most basic contradictions

in their positions. At the same time, there is a crisis of credibility on the part of the government. The government itself is seen to be lacking any meaningful response, while the Maoists have responded to requests made to them. We are keeping up with events and putting pressure on various sides, and the media is applying pressure as well. The Maoists are, again and again, repeating that they are ready for peace talks and negotiation, but the government must cooperate and proceed with an inquiry for that to happen.

"Who are your allies in this effort, particularly the religious people that share your determination?

"The Parliament of All Religions, of which I was the founder, is an important ally in this process. The organization consists of religious leaders, from all different faith traditions in South Asia, who have expressed their interest in this and similar initiatives, and a desire to participate in and assist in facilitating dialogue. Leaders including Sri Sri Ravi Shankar, the Dalai Lama, and Muslim leaders have all expressed good wishes and their keenness to make this type of initiative successful.

"Around the country, everyone I talk to who knows about these efforts wants to settle the conflict and make peace. The government itself has really damaged the whole process. We don't know what to do now.

"You are a pragmatic person, and it is interesting that you are relying in this case on the judicial process. Do you see allies within the government?

"Yes, inside the government there are many people supporting this cause; the case is being handled by the Home Minister, Mr. P. Chidambaram. Some, though, think the Maoists are out to destroy the state, that they are rebels, and that they do not believe in peace and are not to be trusted. The Prime Minister himself was very genuine and compassionate in initiating the call for an inquiry, but he could not get through barriers within the government. I also met the young leader, Rahul Gandhi, who is considered to be a possible future prime minister. He listened to me for almost half an hour, and he agreed that an inquiry is necessary. He said that he will also speak with the prime minister to make sure something is done about it. It has been almost three months, however, and still there is no progress.

"I met with political leaders as well, including from the ruling party, The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the leader of the Women's Party of India, a leader from the

Janata Dal United (JDU), and opposition leaders. They all say that they will raise the question of an inquiry, and directly and indirectly support the cause. The media from time to time as well, approaches me about what can be done. We are keeping the issue alive.

“What about Kashmir?”

“Kashmir is another big issue. It is, though, a different kind of issue. Over the past 60 years it has been a spark for me. In 2008, and then again three months ago, I traveled to Kashmir, and on both occasions I found that the response I received was inspiring.

“I was able to reach across to hard liners in the Kashmiri valley, to those that are considered to be pro-Pakistani and even pro-secession. They welcomed me in their homes, and we had long discussions. One of the top leaders insisted that I stay with him at his residence for the night. I did; he was very friendly. In the morning, I had breakfast with his family. He took a photograph with his children, and he hugged me. I had persuaded him that there should be no violence from the side of the protestors in Kashmir, and if they resorted to throwing stones, it would hamper peaceful developments in the region.

“However, following my trip, there was provocation and an escalation of fighting between protestors and police. I again went to Kashmir, along with my colleagues, without any police, security, or government assistance, with five eminent peace activists from the main land. We visited the injured in hospitals and the families who had lost their young ones in the violence—school boys who had been killed by the police fighting; we also met the state governor and political party leaders. We never felt a negative response. Every one said that they were ready to talk, that they were ready for dialogue, and that they wanted peace, independence, freedom, etc. We returned home, and we demanded a judicial inquiry into the 80 to 85 youth killed by police in the recent fighting. There was no government response to this violence that has taken place.

“At that same time, I received a response from the so called separatist leaders, (though I do not call them separatists; they have a legitimate right to express their views), including one of the top leaders who is quite trusted. Mir Waiz Umer Farooq, that is his name, invited me to give a speech on the occasion of Eid, a great gesture

given the auspicious occasion. I was ready and I booked my ticket, but police fighting broke out the day before I was to leave, and the event was canceled at the last moment. Despite recent episodes of violence, overall, there has been a shift in attitudes that is favorable to peace. In 2008, separatist leaders that I had met were in favor of Pakistan. Now, over the past few months, none are talking about siding with or accepting any help from Pakistan. They say now, “we are not taking to guns; at most we have thrown stones, but should not be accused of being agents of Pakistan.” This is a perceptible shift. Up to now there has not been a single case in which these protestors have come out in favor of violence.

“Kashmiris have maintained their desire for peace and dialogue, and the government itself says it wants dialogue. In September 2010, the government sent the first parliamentary delegation to Kashmir in over 20 years, and it has appointed a three member, non political committee (which also includes some journalists) that has visited Kashmir twice in two months. Some break through is visible. It is no longer that violent, and I can see a movement towards dialogue, but the issue remains quite intractable. Sadly, to date there are no tangible outcomes.

“Let’s see in the next three months what happens, as Kashmiris frozen over during the intense winter. It should be a quiet season. After that, some dialogue or a peace process may start again.

“How do you view the religious threads in all of this? You are clearly a public intellectual and activist. Where does the spiritual aspect come into this?

“In all of these issues, religion has a very prominent role to play. Religion may not have as significant role to play in the dispute with the Maoists, though there are elements that are religious, including the central demand for justice that religious leaders should advance. There is certainly an important role for religious leaders to play in Kashmir, since there are religious (Muslim and Hindu) elements in the conflict. There is a far more central and direct role on other issues, especially the Ayodhya dispute. There, Hindu Muslim conflicts and narratives are at the very center of this long standing dispute. I see some progress, but overall things are still moving very very slowly.

“In the Kashmir Valley, there are almost four to 4.5 million people, and Muslims are the majority

(approximately 2.5 million). India is home to the 2nd largest Muslim population in world, next to Indonesia. The main land Muslim people are near 180 to 200 million strong. There is an obvious need for dialogue.

“I was invited as the first non-Muslim to be a main speaker at an Islamic seminary in Northern India, with many members of the Ulema from the biggest Islamic seminary in world. When the organization organized an event in New Delhi, they invited me to be a main speaker as well. I touched upon the subject of peace in the tradition of Islam; they appreciated it immensely. We need to stand firm and strong against all forms of violence. Coming from a non-Islamic person, when I quote the Prophet, and the Qur’an, it has an impact on building bridges between the two communities.

“In Kashmir, many minority Hindu pandits in Kashmir have been forced out because of religious tensions. There has been no effort to bring them back—that is a pending issue. Also, about 50 to 60,000 members of the Sikh community living in the valley do not favor of secession or independence. Only a few separatist leaders and anti-government protestors seem to demanding separatist politics.

“The political parties are also active in Kashmir. There have been elections that display the success of the democratic process. Even in the midst of snow in the valley, people waited in line in the cold to vote. Sixty-two percent of the total population cast votes. But unfortunately, the government is not performing the full task of governing the people to the best of their ability. The lack of progress from the government has, I think, alienated the people.

“Corruption, among other reasons, is a problem for the lack of trust in the government. If only elected elders would reach out to people in these difficult times, I think it would help to dissipate some of the hard feelings; the Chief Minister can help to assuage tensions by personally visiting the people in Kashmir. But they will not do it. Whenever I have been able to visit and empathize with the people, they are amazed and they appreciate the support. They say that we are the only person to have reached out from the main land. They say that no one visits or comes to their house to talk to them and find out how they feel about the current socio-political problems. Instead, these government officials have passed resolutions to say that Kashmir is part of India, though

they say that they support the people of Kashmir.

“There are also issues of terrorism in and around Kashmir. All Muslims may not be terrorists, but all the terrorists are Muslims. I reached out and held meeting with thousands of people. I spoke in favor of Islam on all the good things that have been done through the Islamic tradition. This has built confidence within the people. Through our Parliament of All Religions, we are also taking steps to build confidence and trust between communities. The Muslim community came out for the first time, and said that Kashmiris part of India and should not secede from India. These are big and positive political changes that are emerging for the first time.

“Where is the Parliament based, what is its structure and how often do you meet?

“It is based in a small office, formed by the Arya Samaj. We have meetings in myhouse. Thus the head office is in Delhi. We also hold conferences in other places with thousands of people coming together to discuss pertinent issues. We call it a common minimum program and address the issues that are affecting all of us because of religion. We discuss the caste system, dowry issues, and other things that are common to all religious communities; participants then return and take up these issues at home.

“It sounds like an informal structure that responds to the needs of the community.

“Yes, you are right. It has not been formalized as of yet. We do not want to formalize it either; we want to have the flexibility to address all the issues that might arise. We welcome all patrons from all religions. We have recently addressed and confronted corruption as part of the Parliament’s Seven Point Charter: i) Combating Castism, ii) Opposing Female Foeticide; iii) Opposing Violence and Communalism; iv). Combating Drugs and Alcohol and Tobacco; v). Combating Blind Faith and Obscurantism; vi). Fighting Corruption; and vii) Fighting Oppression and Exploitation.

“Every day in our society we hear of news of scams and scandals. The religious leaders need to come together more forcefully to discuss these issues.

“How do you see the role of religious leaders in fighting corruption, a lively issue in India and the region?

“The Archbishop of Delhi spoke with Sri Sri Ravi Shankar and other religious leaders; they discussed issues of dignity and public service from all faiths. They

mobilized gatherings of thousands of people from all over the country to discuss and take an active role in countering these problems. The issue of corruption has blown up recently and billions of dollars of cases are coming up to the government. The opposition has united for an inquiry in a special committee, insisting that they will not concede to government demands. The whole Parliament has been prevented from working and is stalled because of this issue.

“Religious leaders are coming together for the first time to speak against corruption. They are issuing statements and drafting proposals and bills to submit to Parliament. There has been a lot of enthusiasm for religious leaders speaking out about corruption.

“In our previous interview you mentioned work you have been involved with on gender issues. Can you expand on that? Is progress being made towards gender equitable development? What about the politics on gender issues?

“Since 1987, when I led a march against sati, I have been making the issues of female infanticide, dowry, bride burning, and property rights for women a central concern. It is not enough that you let the girls be born; you then need to give the girls equal rights to get an education and there should be no dowry abuse and no harassment of brides by in-laws after marriage. We are raising the attention that is paid to these issues; there are currently some new laws to protect women under consideration and many cases in the courts. Overall, there has been a positive response to raising awareness, but the results are not as promising as I would like.

“I went to speak at a Christian girls’ college on issues of gender equality, and the response was tremendous. Even from Muslim groups with orthodox beliefs, they are changing their attitudes about women’s issues and they are not as radical as they might have been in the past or elsewhere. Girls’ education is supported from government organizations, and even Muslim girls are riding bicycles to school. There is a general increase in demand for girls’ education, even in the Muslim communities.

“In the minimum program, you clearly have an anti-alcohol, vegetarianism provision. How does this fit with Christianity and other religions? In Christianity, alcohol is part of ritual and vegetarianism is an option.

“You will be surprised and pleased to hear that the

Christians in Kerala have a predominant presence in this program. We have churches and bishops who are against alcoholism; although wine is a part of the Communion ritual it is a very small part of the ritual and cannot be equated with drinking and the violence that ensues from being drunk.

“Many eminent churches have come out and said they will serve fruit juice instead of wine in the Communion ritual. In fact, they welcome this and other concerns for the community, including smoking, and tobacco chewing. As far as vegetarianism, the Muslim community is not too keen on this idea so we do not push this issue as forcefully. Some communities can take specific issues, but on the whole, solidarity between groups is the most important.

“What are the knowledge gaps around faith and development? What issues would you like to see discussed at the consultation in Dhaka?

“In Dhaka, we must bring about the concept of a common minimum program among religions and build on issues of social justice. All religions which have a strong presence in South Asia need to come out on a common program of social justice; this will change the face of the problems facing India and the region.

“We also need solidarity on other issues that concern the poor and the marginalized. We hear only occasionally and generally at a very government level that meetings on these issues are taking place. There needs to be solidarity in South Asia between religion and cultures of all traditions. We need to bind together to discuss problems like mortality rates for women, women suffering from anemia, and other preventable causes. If women and men of South Asia who are religious and religiously motivated can be included in these discussions and if temples, churches, and mosques can become the centers of empowerment for people, there would be a revolution.

“Political parties have not been able to deliver on the most pressing development issues. I think that civil society could be strengthened, and develop into a powerful informal structure across South Asia. We can utilize religious leaders and pool their resources together to bring about long-term social change. That, as far as I am concerned, is the real purpose of religion. It should not be one event but we need to follow up with each other and be monitored to yield and sustain enthusiasm. ●

AGNIVESH—AN INDIAN FLAME

Agnivesh was born as Vepa Shyam Rao during 1939 into a Brahmin Hindu family in Srikakulam, Andhra Pradesh (editor's note: not British India—no such thing ever existed, nor ever will). He gained law and business management degrees and became a lecturer in Calcutta. During 1968, Shyam became a full-time worker of the global Arya Samaj movement. Two years later, Shyam became a sanyasi, and in that process became known as Swami Agnivesh.

Thousands (surely, many more) may recount Agnivesh as an Indian politician and a former Member of Legislative Assembly from the Indian state of Haryana, who joined Arya Samaj movement as a social activist.

He is best known for his work against bonded labour through the Bonded Labour Liberation Front, which he founded in 1981. Agnivesh became president (2004–2014) of the World Council of Arya Samaj, which is the highest international body of the Arya Samaj movement originally established by Dayanand Saraswati in 1875, and served as the chairperson of the United Nations Voluntary Trust Fund on Contemporary Forms of Slavery from 1994 to 2004.

But Agnivesh—also my maternal uncle—and inspiration for my own career at The United Nations, and that of my sister's at The World Bank—would very sincerely not like to be known by these "trivial accolades."

His own life of humility, ceaseless, often dangerous, self-compromising service to humanity has been an inspiration to many Muslims (through my sister's beautiful family), Sikhs (my own father and cousins), Christians (my wife and son), Hindus (my beautiful mother, Agnivesh's baby sister), Jews—and perhaps most importantly, Atheists around the world (proudly, with a capital A).

Both as an uncle (and global thought leader), I grew up admiring Agnivesh as a proponent of interfaith dialogue (and basic common sense) and as a member of the Board of World Leaders for the Elijah Interfaith Institute. Agnivesh also served his wider causes as a board member of the KAICIID Dialogue Centre established in Vienna in 2012 by King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia, together with The Government of Spain.

In the end, I also knew that Swamiji privately as an uncle, who liked to simply just be called Agnivesh (never Swamiji). He did not like his feet to be touched as a mindless exercise of blind faith, and he was definitely against blind faith in anything (especially religion), over the use of a God-given mind (whatever that supposed God may itself be...).

From his most humble circumstances and ideals, Agnivesh used his entire life to simply ask us look at ourselves—perhaps in a moment of quiet, shame. He beseeched us to just stop, and perhaps

consider a new way of living.

We as global citizens; as a global diaspora of Indians spread throughout the earth; as Indians of all languages, faiths and cultures; owe these enlightened leaders the respect of at least a listening. Success is not even a requirement. Merely stopping to listen, and to PERHAPS try again, would be divinity enough.

Surely, not a single human being needs to be a Swami to understand this. It is precisely NOW, that this tiny Indian flame RAGE throughout the world, to SCORCH new earth and plant new seed through thought and karmic action. This shall be Mother India's gift to the world—free of charge. A GIFT TO THE ENTIRE WORLD, from a most enlightened and civilized peoples...AMMA TUJHE SALAM !

-Vikram Jit Singh

(Swami Agnivesh's nephew) September 2020

AGNIVESH—AN INDIAN FLAME

Swami Agnivesh—my maternal uncle—has been and continues to be the central source of inspiration for our family. He supported my mother, stemming from an Orthodox Hindu Brahmin family, when she decided that she would marry a Sikh who underwent Partition. He supported my sister when she decided she should would make an Afghan Muslim her life partner. Facing road blocks on all sides, he flew to the United States and assisted in her Arya Samaj marriage ceremony carried out by a Hindu priestess. Professionally, he guided me towards my own career at The United Nations. His own life of humility, ceaseless, often dangerous, self-compromising service to humanity has been an inspiration to many Muslims (my sister and her family), Sikhs (my own father and cousins), Christians & Orthodox Christians (my wife and son), as well as Hindus (my beautiful mother, Agnivesh's baby sister). Both as an uncle and global thought leader, I grew up admiring Agnivesh as a proponent of interfaith dialogue (and basic common sense) against blind faith in anything (especially religion), over the use of a God-given mind (whatever that supposed God may itself be...). From his most humble circumstances and ideals, Agnivesh has used his entire professional life to simply ask us look at ourselves—perhaps in a moment of quiet, shame. He has beseeched us to just stop, and perhaps consider a new way of living. Living in the service of others as the ultimate form or prayer and truth. We as global citizens; as a global diaspora of Indians spread throughout the earth; as Indians of all languages, faiths and cultures; owe such enlightened leaders the respect of at least a listening. Success is not even a requirement. Merely stopping to listen, and to PERHAPS try again, would be divinity enough. Surely, not a single human being needs to be a Swami to understand this. It is precisely NOW, that this tiny Indian flame RAGE throughout the world, to SCORCH new earth and plant new seed. **AMMA TUJHE SALAM!**

- Vikram Jit Singh

वैदिक समाजवाद

-स्वामी अग्निवेश जी

आर्य समाज के प्रवर्तक महर्षि दयानन्द ने आज से १४५ वर्ष पहले धार्मिक, सामाजिक, आर्थिक, राजनैतिक गुलामी तथा शोषण, अन्धविश्वास तथा पाखण्डवाद, जन्मजातिवाद तथा नारी-उत्पीड़न आदि सैकड़ों सवालों और रूढ़िवादी सड़ी-गली मान्यताओं के विरुद्ध एक वैचारिक क्रांति की मशाल जलाई थी।

इसी मशाल की रोशनी में अनेकानेक क्रांतिवीरों ने संघर्ष का बिगुल बजाया और एक नये समाज के सपने को साकारकरने के लिए



चुनौती दें और हम सब मिलकर समाज-परिवर्तन के लिए एक ध्येयकता ज्वालामुखी बन जायें। पर रूढ़िवाद को चुनौती देते रहना जहाँ जरूरी है वहाँ सारी पुरानी चीजों को, यहाँ तक, कि कुछ अच्छी, बुनियादी संस्थाओं एवं व्यवस्थाओं को भी नष्ट कर देना ऐसा ही है जैसे नाक पर बैठी मक्खी उड़ा देने की अपेक्षापुरी नाक ही काट कर फेंक देना। आमूलचूल परिवर्तन का समावोष बात को कड़ने का ढंग तो हो सकता है, पर न तो कभी व्यक्ति का और न ही समाजका

हँसते-हँसते शहदत का जाम पी लिया। पर अभी भी चुनौतियां बाकी हैं और इन मुद्दों पर संघर्ष भी जारी है।

पिछले पचास-पचापन

वर्षों के आगने सामाजिक जीवन में मेरा सबसे अधिक सगाय बीता है बंधुआ मजदूरी और बाल मजदूरी के विरुद्ध विद्रोह करने में। इस संघर्ष के दौरान मैंने पाया कि वर्तमान समय तक हमारे देशके धर्मस्थलों में गरीबों, दलितों की कुंवारी बेटी को देवदासी अथवा जोगिन के रूप में बंधुआ बनाकर धर्म और समाजके ठेकेदार उसका देह-शोषण करते रहे हैं। जातिवाद, भाषावाद, पूंजीवाद और धार्मिक



आमूलचूल परिवर्तन होता है। व्यक्ति के और समाज के अपने कुछ शाश्वत मूल्य होते हैं, कुछ सनातन धर्म होता है, जिसके इर्द गिर्द कभी कोई तो कभी कोई व्यवस्था और संस्था खड़ी हो जाती है। जरूरत इस

बातकी रहती है कि उन

सनातन मूल्यों के प्रति आस्था रखने वाले व्यक्ति और साझ अपनी व्यवस्था को अपनी संस्थाओं को साध्य (End) के रूप में नहीं अपितु साधन (Means) के रूप में देखें और साधनों का परिमार्जन इतने सलीके से, इतने सटीक ढंग से करें कि मूल्य बने रहें, पर ढांचा बदलता रहे। गड़बड़ तब होती जब ढांचागत परिवर्तन के नाम पर शाश्वत सनातन मूल्य को बदल डाला जाता है।

पाखाडवाद को जलाकर राख कर देने वाली आग ही बंधुआ मजदूरी, बाल मजदूरी एवं बाल वैश्यावृत्ति जैसे शोषण एवं अन्याय को समाप्तकर सकती है।

आइये! इसे आग की रोशनी में हम कुछ रूढ़िवादी मान्यताओं को

जब अन्दर के मूल्य बदलने लगते हैं तो ऊपरी चकाचौंध के बीच आदमी अन्दर से खोखला होने लगता है, परिवार टूटने लगता है, समाज बिखरने लगता है और बच जाती है केवल एक गुण गरीबिका!

आज का चलन कुछ ऐसा है कि समाज में जब भी व्यवस्था



परिवर्तन की बात होती है तो सारी बहस पूंजीवाद, साम्यवाद और बाजारवाद पर आकर टिक जाती है। पूंजीवाद के विकल्प रूप में साम्यवाद ने दुनियाँ के करोड़ों लोगों को आकर्षित किया पर सोवियत यूनियन के विघटन के बाद बड़ी तेजी से एकराफा बाजारवाद का तौल पीटा जा रहा है।

इस बहस में आज में नये सिरे से एक ऐसी व्यवस्था का उल्लेख करना चाहूँगा जिसे या तो जातिवाद का पर्याय मानकर अवांछनीय और अमानवीय कसर दिया जा चुका है अथवा आधुनिक आर्थिक-सामाजिक प्रणाली की जटिलता के दृष्टिगत अव्यावहारिक तथा अपर्याप्त मानकर वेचारिक बहस के लिए भी अनावश्यक मान लिया गया है। इस व्यवस्था का नाम है **वर्णाश्रम-व्यवस्था**।

वर्णाश्रम-व्यवस्था के प्रति पूर्वाग्रहों को जानते हुए भी आज मुझे उसकी अत्यन्त उपयोगिता नजर आती है। न मैं समाजशास्त्र का ज्ञाता हूँ और न ही इतिहास का विद्वान्। पर समाज के दलित-शोषित समूहों, बंद्गुआ मजदूरों, बाल मजदूरों के शोषण से मुक्ति के लिए जारी संघर्ष का एक विनम्र साथी होने के नाते एक छटपटाहट का, एक बेवेनी का मैंने बार-बार अनुभव किया है और समूची सामाजिक, आर्थिक, राजनैतिक तथा धार्मिक-व्यवस्था को इसके लिए दोषी मानकर विद्रोही मानसिकता से जब और जितना चिन्तन किया तब-तब वर्णाश्रम व्यवस्था के मूल तत्वों में रोशनी की करण देखी है।

वर्णाश्रम-व्यवस्था का स्वरूप :वर्ण शब्द वैदिक व्याकरण निष्कृत के अनुसार **वृ वृणोते** धातु से बना है जिसका अर्थ है चुनना, चरण करना आदि। वर्ण-व्यवस्था में हर बच्चे को अपने लिए अपने जीवन का मिशन चुनने की प्रेरणा है। इस मिशन का चुनाव करने में माता, पिता, आचार्य, सहयोगी-सहायक तो हो सकते हैं पर निर्णय करनेकी स्वतन्त्रता पूरी तरह उस युवा की है जो अपने जीवन को अपने गुण, कर्म एवं स्वभाव के अनुसार ढालना चाहता है। जीवन को स्वार्थ-भावना से हटाकर परमार्थ की तरफ ले जाना है। व्यक्ति से समष्टि की ओर उन्मुख होना है। यह भाव जितना-जितना पुष्ट होता जायेगा उतना-उतना व्यक्ति व्यक्तिवादी न होकर समाजवादी होता जायेगा। **अपने से उपर उठना ही (Transcendental) अध्यात्म की धारा है। कड़ी सेकड़ी मेहनत करना हुआ भी व्यक्ति फल के प्रति आसक्त नहीं होता। जीवन यज्ञमय हो जाता है। श्रेष्ठतम कार्य करके भी व्यक्ति इदन्त मम-यह मेरा नहीं है, कहता जाता है।**

यज्ञोपवीत संस्कार का इसीलिये बड़ा महत्व है। उपवीत कहते हैं रस्सी को। फाँसी देने की रस्सी **पशोपवीत** कहलाती है। दृष्ट दुष्टने के लिए गाय के पैरों में बंधी रस्सी **दोहनोपवीत** कहलाती है। दृष्ट

दुष्टने के लिए गाय के पैरों में बंधी रस्सी **दोहनोपवीत** कहलाती है। इसी तरह जीवन को यज्ञ से जोड़देने वाली रस्सी **यज्ञोपवीत** बनकर सुशोभित होती है। यज्ञ शब्द भी यन् धातु से बना है। इसका अर्थ है वान, देवपूजा और संगठन के आवेशों के प्रति समर्पित होना। संगठन करना और संगठन के आवेशों के प्रति समर्पित होना। हवनकुण्ड में अग्नि प्रदीप्त कर समिधा-सामग्री स्वाहा करना भी यज्ञ कहलाता है क्योंकि प्रतीक रूप में यज्ञ यही प्रेरणा देता है। **जीवन में प्रकाश और सुगन्ध पैदा करनी है तो संकल्प की अग्नि प्रदीप्त करें** और अपने जीवन को, अपनी जवानी को उस संकल्पानि के लिए समिधा बनाकर रख कर दें।

वर्णाश्रम व्यवस्था की विशेषताएँ-जन्म से न तो कोई ब्रह्मण होगा और न ही क्षत्रिय या वैश्य। **जन्मना जायते शूद्र, संस्कारात् द्विज उच्यते** के अनुसार सभी बच्चे शूद्र की कोटि में होंगे-अपने संस्कारों से ही उन्हें **द्विज का अर्थात् ज्ञान एवं योग्यता रूपी दूसरा जन्म मिलेगा।** समाज में हर बालक-बालिका को संस्कारों के विकास के लिये शिक्षा के यथासम्भव समान अवसर मिलेंगे।

शिक्षा-दीक्षा की पूरी व्यवस्था में आरम्भ से अन्त तक हर बच्चे के बनने पर जोर होगा। अपने गुण, कर्म एवं स्वभाव से बच्चा यह चुनने के लिए स्वतंत्र होगा कि वह अज्ञान से लड़े, अन्याय से लड़े या फिर अभाव से लड़े। अज्ञान को, असत्य को मिटाकर ज्ञान एवं सत्य की ज्योति को जलाये रखने का संकल्प लेकर आगे बढ़ने वाला युवा **ब्राह्मण**, अन्याय को मिटाकर न्याय की स्थापना के लिए संघर्ष करने वाला व्यक्ति क्षत्रिय तथा अभाव को दूरकर, यशेष्ट मात्रा में अन्न, वस्त्रादि का उतादन करने वाला व्यक्ति वैश्य कहलायेगा। इन तीनों में किसी भी एक वर्ण के लिए अन्याय रह गये युवा को शूद्र की कोटि में रहकर एक बार फिर कौशिश करनी होगी। ब्राह्मण अथवा क्षत्रिय अथवा वैश्य के साथ रहकर सेवा-शुश्रूपाकरते हुए कुछ समय बाद वह अपनी योग्यता का विकास कर अपनी मजिल पा लेगा।

चौँके वैदिक वर्ण-व्यवस्था जन्म पर आधारित न होकर गुण, कर्म, स्वभाव कर आधारित थी, अतः वह परिवर्तनशील थी। ऐसे अनेक उदाहरण हैं जो इस तथ्य की पुष्टि करते हैं। **विश्वामित्र मूलतः क्षत्रिय थे किन्तु ब्रह्मल प्राप्त कर वे ब्राह्मण वर्ण में दीक्षित हुए। रामायण और महाभारत इन दोनों महान् ग्रंथों के रचयिता वाल्मीकी और वेदव्यास शूद्र कुलोत्पन्न थे लेकिन अपने संस्कारों से ब्राह्मण कहलाये। ऋग्वेद पर अनेक ग्रंथों की रचना करने वाला ऐतरेय ऋषि भी जुआरी था, सरस्वती तट पर हो रहे एक याज्ञिक अनुष्ठान से उसे निकाल बाहर किया गया था। किन्तु बाद में जब उसमें सुधार आया**





तो उसे पुनः यज्ञ का आचार्य बनाया गया। सत्यकाम जावाल जो कि वेश्या-पुत्र था, अपनी विद्वता एवं उच्च संस्कारों के कारण ब्राह्मण वर्ण को पा गया। गोवध के कारण पृथ्व शूद्र हो गया। नाभय वैश्यावृत्ति के कारण निष्कासिकर हुए लेकिन उनकी सन्तान पुनः राजा बनी। विश्वामित्र की सन्तानें पितृ-द्रोह के कारण शूद्र वर्ण में धकेल दी गई। परशुराम, द्रोणाचार्य, कृपाचार्य, अश्वत्थामा, इन्द्र, बाहण से क्षत्रिय बने तो विश्वामित्र की तरह सम्राट शयति, सम्राट ऋषभदेव के ८६ पुत्रों को ब्रह्मत्व प्राप्त हुआ। पुराण साहित्य वाण परिवर्तन के ऐसे असंख्य उदाहरणों से भरा पड़ा है लेकिन तथाकथित सनातनधर्मी आचार्य आज भी वर्ण-व्यवस्था के ठीक विपरीत हैं। इस प्रकार वर्ण-व्यवस्था के वैज्ञानिक एवं सकारात्मक आधार को पूर्णतः नष्ट कर दिया गया है। आज यह व्यवस्था जात-पात की वेदी पर शहीद हो रही है जिससे पात्रता और सामाजिक अनुशासन भंग हो चुका है। इसे विडम्बना ही माना जाएगा कि जाति प्रथा के समस्त दोष वर्ण-व्यवस्था के खते में जमा कर दिए गए हैं जबकि जाति और वर्ण में मौलिक भेद है। दोनों एक दूसरे से विपरीत हैं, दोनों के लक्षण एवं उद्देश्य में धर्ती-आकाश का अन्तर है। जाति-प्रथा के महाजाल से खुटकारा दिलाने के लिए ही महर्षि दयानन्द ने इस पुरातन एवं उपाक्षित वैदिक वर्ण-व्यवस्था को पुनर्जीवित करनेका अभियान चलाया, जिसे दुर्भाग्य से समझा नहीं गया।

लेकिन आज ब्राह्मण, क्षत्रिय, शूद्र जन्मना जातिवादी अर्थों में इतने रूढ़ हो गया है और इतनी उपजातियों में बंट गया है कि इनको फिर से इन्हीं नामों से खड़ा करना खतरों से खाली नहीं है। इसलिये नामों का विशेष आग्रह न रखते हुए वर्ण-व्यवस्था की मूल-भावना को प्रतिष्ठित करना होगा।

इन में सबसे प्रमुख बात यह होगी अपने स्वार्थ से उपर उठकर समाज के हित में जीना और काम करना। इस तरह हर व्यक्ति को दत्त में दीक्षित कर, उसके उपकरणों में शिक्षित कर एक मिशनरी बनाकर तैयार करना। संक्षिप्त में कहें तो आज की मरसनरी (Mercenary) व्यवस्था के बदले एक मिशनरी व्यवस्था की ओर

बढ़ना। इसमें आगे चलकर यह भी निहित होगा कि प्रत्येक युवा को समाज उसकी योगदानानुसार साधन भी देगा। जैसे ब्राह्मण को पठनपाठन, शोध एवं लेखन के लिये विद्यालय, पुस्तकालय, अनुसंधान केन्द्र आदि। क्षत्रिय युवा को समाज उसकी योगदानानुसार साधन भी देगा। जैसे ब्राह्मण को पठनपाठन, शोध एवं लेखन के लिये विद्यालय, पुस्तकालय, अनुसंधान केन्द्र आदि। क्षत्रिय को अन्त्याय के विरुद्ध संघर्ष करने के यथायोग्य इशियार एवं रखरखाव तथा वैश्य युवा को उत्पादन के साधन यथा जमीन, कल, कारखाने इत्यादि। पर किसी व्यक्ति को अपने साधन के उपयोगके अतिरिक्त स्वामित्व का अधिकार नहीं होगा अर्थात् अपने किसी भी साधन को व्यक्ति खरीद-बेच नहीं सकता, गिरवी नहीं रख सकता और न ही वसीयत कर सकता है। आज काफ़ी इद तक शिक्षा एवं रक्षा के साधनों के निजी स्वामित्व नहीं है पर उत्पादन एवं वितरण के साधनों पर बहुत इद तक निजी स्वामित्व है। बाजारवाद में यह निजी स्वामित्व अधिकतम सीमा तक जायेगा। उत्पादन, वितरण के अलावा विनिमय (Exchange) के साधनों पर भी निजी स्वामित्व, ज्ञान विज्ञान, बौद्धिक संपदा, जैविक सम्पदा आदि आदि पर भी निजी स्वामित्व पूंजीवादी शोषण-व्यवस्था का ऐसा भयावह रूप है जिसमें बिना किसी वस्तु व्यापार के भी विशुद्ध सट्टेबाजी में प्रतिदिन लगभग १.४ ट्रिलियन (खरब) डालर का व्यापार हो रहा है। परिणामस्वरूप गरीब देशों की मुद्रा का अवमूल्यन हो रहा है। कुछ चंद्र धनी देशों की मुद्रा में अलक्षिक बढ़ोतरी होती जा रही है।

आश्रम-व्यवस्था में एक औसत १०० वर्ष के जीवन काल को चार काल खण्डों में बांटकर प्रथम ब्रह्मचर्य आश्रम में संयम, सादगी एवं तप-साधना के साथ विद्याभ्ययन, गृहस्थाश्रम में विवाह, संतानोत्पत्ति एवं अपने वर्णानुसार समाज, समाज-सेवा, वानप्रस्थाश्रम में निजी परिवार व साधनों से अलग होकर समाज सेवा और संन्यासाश्रम में पूरी तरह सभी ऐषणार्थ-पुत्रैषण, वित्तैषण एवं लोकैषण से मुक्त होकर ईश्वरोपभवा तथा विश्व नागरिक की भूमिका में **वसुधैव कुटुम्बकम्** की समष्टिगत भावना को प्रबल करना।



प्रत्येक व्यक्ति के लिए जहाँ अपने गुण-कर्म-स्वभाव के अनुसार वर्ण का चुनाव करने की स्वतन्त्रता होगी वहीं आश्रम-व्यवस्था लगभग सभी पर लागू होगी। स्थूल रूप में सभी को चारों आश्रमों की मर्यादा को शिरोधार्य कर अपना जीवन चलाना होगा।

इस पुरी प्रक्रिया में राजशक्ति से अधिक लोकशक्ति का प्रयोग किया जाय और व्यक्ति व्यक्ति को लेकर पूरा सामाज, पूरा विश्व सत्य, प्रेम, करुणा एवं न्याय आदि के शाश्वत आध्यात्मिक मूल्यों से अभिभूत रहेंतभी एक नया समाज और एक नई मानवीय संस्कृति पुष्टित एवं पल्लवित होगी।

इसके विपरीत साम्बाद और बाजारवाद के मूल में भौतिकवादी चिन्तन की प्राथमिकता भोगवाद की इद तक जाकर प्रकट होती है। भोगवाद का जीवन-दर्शन जितना अधिक महिमामण्डित होता रहेगा उतना ही अधिक विकास के नाम पर प्रकृति का निमम दोहन और मनुष्य द्वारा मनुष्य का शोषण विकराल तथा अधिक विनाशकारी होता जायेगा। धरती के १८ प्रतिशत लोगों द्वारा ८२ प्रतिशत संसाधनों पर

स्थापित अनीधकार वर्चस्व एवं अहंकारपूर्ण दोहन ने पूरी मानवता को पर्यावरणीय संकट के विस्फोट ककार के वैभव और ऐयाशी में लेशमात्र भी परिवर्तन नहीं है। १९९२ में आयोजित रियो विश्व शिखर सम्मेलन में अमेरिका के तत्कालीन राष्ट्रपति श्री जॉर्ज बुश की दम्भपूर्ण गर्वाक्ति कि, **अमेरिकी जीवन शैली को बदलने के लिए सोचना भी हमारे लिए नागवार है- American life style is not up for negotiation**- अमेरिका के अलावा कैंनेडा, इंग्लैंड, फ्रांस, जर्मनी, इटली और जापान (जी-७) ने आज विश्व में वर्चस्व बना रखा है।

अन्तराष्ट्रीय मुद्रा-कोष, विश्व-बैंक और विश्व-व्यापार संगठन पर इन्हीं देशों ने दबदबा बना रखा है। इन्हीं के देशस्थ बहुराष्ट्रीय कम्पनियाँ आधुनिकता तकनीक को हथियार बनाकर और बौद्धिक संपदा के नाम पर मानवता के शोषण तक को गिरवी रखकर आज समूची सभ्यता को निगल जाना चाहती है। आणविक शस्त्र भण्डार के मालिक के रूप में यही अमेरिका अपने पीछे रूस, इंग्लैंड, फ्रांस और चीन (पी ५) को लगाये पूरे संयुक्त राष्ट्र संघ (यू.एन.ओ.) को अपनी





जोब में डाले घूमता है और बात-बात पर भारत जैसे देशों को आर्थिक नाकेबंदी की धमकी देकर वैश्विक-वादागिरी की बात करता है । टेक्नोलॉजी विकास का आलम यह है कि अपनी आणविक क्षमता को अधिक सहेराक बनाने के लिए अमेरिका प्रतिवर्ष वार अरब डालर मिसाइलों पर, तैतिस अरब डालर परमाणु हथियारों पर और न जाने किन्तने-किन्तने अरब डालर अन्य कम्प्यूटीकृत परिक्षणों पर खर्व कर देता है । यही वजह है कि ८२ प्रतिशत लोगों के पास यदि टेक्नोलॉजी (Technology) का एक हिस्सा है तो इन १८ प्रतिशत लोगों के पास टेक्नोलॉजी का पवास प्रतिशत हिस्सा (५०:१) । इन विकसित देशों द्वारा सइन्स (और टेक्नोलॉजी के नये-नये अविकारों तथा अनुसन्धानों पर बेतहशा धन खर्व किया जाता है जिसका सबसे बड़ा हिस्सा सीधे अस्त्र-शस्त्रों की संहारक शक्ति ढाढ़ाने में लाता है । बदले में विकसित राष्ट्र दुनिया के विकासशील राष्ट्रों को महँगों से महँगों ढामों में अपने हथियार बेचकर अपनी अर्थव्यवस्था मजबूत करने में लगे रहते हैं । मजबूर बात तो यह है कि जो देश सबसे ज्यादा हथियारों का उत्पादन और निर्यात करते हैं वे ही सबसे ज्यादा जोर से मानव अधिकारों की बात करते हैं

सन् १९६० में विश्व के बीस प्रतिशत अमीर लोगों की आय विश्व के बीस प्रतिशत गरीब लोगों की आय का तीस गुना था । तीस साल बाद १९९० में अमीर गरीब की खाई तीस गुणा से बढ़कर साठ गुणा हो गई । आज अमेरिका के पास कम से कम ८६५० प्रक्षेपास्त्र परमाणु बमों से लैस चौबीस घण्टे तैनात हैं । अमेरीकी राष्ट्रपति के बटन दबाते ही वे समूची धरती पर मौत का ऐसा प्रलयकारी ताण्डव कर सकते हैं कि हजारों-हजारों साल तक मनुष्य तो क्या, किसी प्राणी का पता ही नहीं चलेगा । इसी के कुछ मुकाबले पर रूस के ६२४०, फ्रांस



के ४५०, इंग्लैंड के २६०, और चीन के ४०० प्रक्षेपास्त्र विनाश के विकराल दैत्य की तरह दांत कटकटाते खड़े हैं । प्रतिवर्ष १५० अरब डालर केवल हथियारों पर खर्व करने वाले इस दुनिया के ठेकेदारों को कौन बताये कि इसमें केवल १० से १५ प्रतिशत कटौती करने पर दुनियाँ से भूख, लाचारी बेबसी और बीमारी खत्म की जा सकती है और यदि यहसारी राशि युद्धोन्माद के बदले शान्ति और सुख की संरचना में लग जाए तो धरती सचमुच काल्पनिक स्वर्ग से भी अधिक सुन्दर हो सकती है । सवाल है कि क्या ऐसा संभव है ? क्या विश्व को इस सर्वांश के कगार से वापस लाया जा सकता है ? उत्तर होना-हों, बशर्ते हम इस सृष्टि के रचयिता परम कर्षणिक परमात्मा के प्रति विनम्र होकर अपने होने का उद्देश्य और उस उद्देश्य की प्राप्ति को सर्वोपरि मानकर वैयक्तिक एवं सामाजिक-आर्थिक जीवन की नये सिरे से संरचना करें ।

चारों वेद, ग्यारह उपनिषद् तथा छह दर्शन: वैशीषिक (कणाद), मीमांसा (जैमिनी), योग (पातंजलि), न्याय (गौतम :) सांख्य (कपिल), एवं वेदान्त (वेदव्यास) आदि आर्य ग्रन्थों का निचोड़ है- त्रैतवाद, जिसके अनुसार प्रकृति, जीवात्मा और परमात्मा तीनों अनदि एवं अनन्त सत्ताएं हैं । प्रकृति सत् है, जीवात्मा सत् एवं चित है, परमात्मा सत्, चित एवं आनन्द, सच्चिदानन्द है । मनुष्य रूप में जीवात्मा आनन्द की तलाश में भटक रहा है, जो उस परमात्मा की उपासना से मिल सकता है पर अज्ञानवश वह जड़ प्रकृति की ओर आकर्षित होता है और क्षणिक शारीरिक सुख को ही परमानन्द के धोखे में भोगता, अशान्त और दुखी रहता है । उसके इस अज्ञान के मूल में होता है, अनित्य में नित्य की भावना । जो क्षणिक है, क्षणभंगुर है । वह उसे ही नित्य एवं शाश्वत मानकर आसक्त हो जाता है- यही उसके दुःख का प्रमुख कारण है । कुना जिस तरह सूखी हड्डी को चबाता और मुँह से निकले खून को ही हड्डी से निकला रस मानकर आसक्त रहतै है-लाभग ऐसी ही स्थिति मनुष्य रूप में शरीरधारी जीवात्मा की होती है ।

इस अज्ञान के मूल कारण-अनित्य में नित्य की भावना से छुटकारा कैसे मिले ? अपने शरीर के बारे में, अपने मन के बारे में जो-जो सत्य है उसे अनुभूति पर उतारना । उसी अनुभूतिक सत्य (एक्सपीरिएंशल ट्रुथ) के सहारे एक-एक इंच आगे बढ़ना । अपने अन्दर के राग को अनित्य जानकर लीनों से तटस्थ होकर, मन को समता में स्थित करने का अभ्यास करते-करते स्थिराज्ञ बनने की साधना करना । जिस-जिस अनुपात से व्यक्ति तनावरहित होकर आनन्द और परमानन्द की अनुभूति अपने आप करने लगता है और एक दिन साधना की चरम सीमा पर पहुँच कर निर्वाण अथवा मोक्ष को प्राप्त होता है जो सुदीर्घकालीन अनिर्वचनीय आनन्द की गति है ।

प्रश्न है कि क्या सत्य की यह साधना और मोक्ष की प्राप्ति नितान्त वैयक्तिक है ? समाज से दूर पर्वत की कन्दराओं में समाधिस्थ हो जाना ही क्या इसका रास्ता है ? क्या ब्रह्म ही एकमात्र सत्य है और जगत् तथा इसके कार्यकलाप सब मिथ्या है ? **ब्रह्मसत्य-जगत मिथ्या** की इस एकांगी धारणा ने धर्म के नाम पर ढेर सारी विकृतियों को जन्म दिया । मुट्ठी भर लोग जिन्होंने धर्म की इस एकांगी साधन का डोंग किया, वे धर्म के साथ-साथ ईश्वर के भी ठेकेदार हो गये । कालान्तर में इस विकृति के चलते ऐसे लोग छ गए जिन्होंने धर्म का, ईश्वरोपसना



तत्कालीन राष्ट्रपति जी. वेंकटरमण जी के साथ स्वामी अग्निवेश जी

को, कर्मकाण्डों को जटिल, दुष्ट रह बनाने के साथ-साथ अपना जन्मना एकाधिकार स्थापित कर लिया और बाकी समाज को स्वर्ग अथवा नरक में भेजने का जिम्मा ले लिया। वास्तव में देखा जाए तो इसी समाज को संवसुत्र का स्वर्ग बनाने के बदले एक काल्पनिक स्वर्ग का सपना दिखाया गया और उसके पासपोर्ट-वीजा आदि का दफ्तर अपने पास ही खोल लिया। जन्मनाजातिवाद के बीज जब अंकुरित होकर पल्लवित होने लगे तो सहज ज्ञान और सहज साधना को और भी सीमित करने के इरादे से इन ठेकेदारों ने **स्त्री शूद्रों नापीयताम्**,

कहकर स्त्री मात्र को तथा जो ब्राह्मण, क्षत्रिय या वैश्य के अलावा ८५ प्रतिशत समाज था, उसे शूद्र बताकर ज्ञान एवं साधना के दरवाजे उनके लिए बन्द कर दिये। जन्म से अपने आपको ब्राह्मण घोषित करने वाला प्राणी ब्राह्मणवादी की भूमिका में आकर निस्तेज और निर्वीर्य तो हुआ ही, निरंकुश और अहंकारी भी हो गया और दम्भ की पराकाष्ठा पर पहुँच कर फ़तवा दे डाला कि **अनजान में यदि कोई स्त्री अथवा शूद्र वेद मन्त्र का उच्चारण कर ले तो उसकी जिह्वा का छेदन कर दिया जाए, मुन ले तो कान में सीसा पिघला कर डाल**



बाल मजदूरों के साथ तत्कालीन राष्ट्रपति के.आर. वेंकटरमण जी व स्वामी अग्निवेश जी



दिया जाये और हृदय में धारण कर ले तो उसका हृदयस्थल छलनी-छलनी कर दिया जाए। पाँच हजार वर्षों तक ब्राह्मवादी द्रोणाचार्यों की जमात करोड़ों एकलव्यों के अंगूठे काट कर अपने क्षत्रिय पुत्रों, अपने राजपुत्रों के एकाधिकार का मार्ग प्रशस्त करती रही। बीच में किसी सिद्धार्थ गौतम ने आकर इस ब्राह्मणवाद को चुनौती दी और नारी को, शूद्र को, यहाँ तक की मूक पशुओं के भी अधिकार का प्रश्न उठाया तो इस युगान्तरकारी विजय को कुचलने के लिए अद्वैतवाद का झंडा उठाये आदिशंकराचार्य आ धमके। नारीमात्र के सहज

स्वाभिमान तक को नष्ट करने के हरादे से उन्होंने विवेक चूड़ामणि में स्वातल किया-**किमेकं नरकस्य द्वारम् : ?** नरक का द्वार कौन है ? और स्वयं ही उत्तर दे दिया- **नारी !**

गौतम बुद्ध की तरह जब भगवान् महावीर ने भी प्राणीमात्र के प्रति करुणा और न्याय की भावना से प्रेरित होकर ब्राह्मणवाद के एकाधिकारी तत्वों के विकृष्ट विग्रह किया और 'आर्य संस्कृति की पुनर्स्थापना का प्रयास किया तो तथाकथित धर्मव्यजियों ने उन दोनों को महानास्तिक घोषित कर जड़ से उखाड़ने की कोशिश की।



पूरे इतिहास में एक ही क्रम दीखता है। 'ईश्वर', 'ईश्वरीय ज्ञान-विज्ञान' पर कब्जा करो। धर्पासना को सहज के बदले जटिल बनाओं। व्यक्ति का स्थान उसके गुण, कर्म और स्वभाव के बदले उसके जन्म से तय करो।

इसी को आधार बनाकर प्रकृति और प्राकृतिक संसाधनों पर पूरे समाज के अधिकार को छीनकर उसे सीमित हाथों में रख शोषण एवं यथास्थितिवाद का पोषण करो। जो भी विचारों की अग्नि ले विद्रोह का झंडा उठाये उसे नास्तिक बताकर ईश्वरीय सृष्टि का दुश्मन घोषित करो। फिर भी न माने तो धीरे से घुसपैठ करो विद्रोही सेना में और वैचारिक क्रान्ति की सुलगाती धधकती गशाल को पत्थर को पाषाण प्रतिमा में बदलकर जड़ पूजा के बहाने उस क्रान्ति को निस्तेज कर दो। समाज में जब-जब धर्म इतना विकृता हो जाता है कि वह अपने मूल ओजस्वी स्वरूप के ठीक विपरीत पाखण्ड और पाषाण-पूजन में बदल जाता है तब-तब तक प्रचण्ड-विद्रोह का रूप लेकर दलित-शोषित समाज उठ खड़ा होता है, उस विकृत धर्म को ध्वस्त कर एक नई वैचारिक क्रान्ति की स्थापना करने के लिए जिसमें जन्म पर आधारित और शोषण पर आधारित विषमतामूलक व्यवस्था के प्रति आक्रोश होता है। पर निहित स्वार्थ के जो गढ़ पूरी तरह नष्ट नहीं हो पाते, वे छिपकर, दबे पांव, संघे बदलकर उस नये परिवेश पर धीरे-धीरे कब्जा कर लेते हैं। अन्याय के विरुद्ध उठा हुआ आक्रोश का लावा ठंडा होते-होते एक नया धर्म, नई पीढ़ियों के हाथों, नई सृष्टियों, नई मूर्तियों और नई बेड़ियों में बदलकर फिर उसी अन्याय की व्यवस्था के लिए उषजाऊ भूमि बन जाता है।

पाँच हजार वर्ष पूर्व द्रोणाचार्य की जन्मना विषमता मूलक व्यवस्था को तोड़ने के लिए ही तो कृष्ण ने गीता में गरज कर घोषणा की थी :

वातुर्वप्य मया सृज्वा, गुण कर्म विभागशः

पैदा होने से पहले ही मौत का वारन्ट जिसके नाम पर जारी हो गया हो, जो पैदा ही जेल के सीखव्यों के पीछे हुआ, ऐसे महान् क्रान्तिकारी कृष्ण ने अपनी किशोरा वस्था में ही संगठित किया शोषित ग्वाल बालों और गोपियों को और खड़ा कर दिया, उन्हें अपने सगे मामा कंस के अन्याय के खिलाफ।

उसी कृष्ण में यह साहस था कि वह अर्जुन को ललकार कर कह सके कि तुम्हारा अपना सगा रिश्तेदार, गुरु और पितामह ही अन्याय का पक्ष लेकर क्यों न खड़ा हुआ हो, उठाओ गाण्डीय और ईट से ईट बना दो दुष्ट दुर्योधन और दुःशासन के कुशासन की। गीता का निष्कर्ष एक शब्द में: **अन्याय एवं असुरी प्रवृत्तियों का प्रतिकार ही धर्म है।**

जिस कृष्ण ने जन्म से मृत्युपर्यन्त अन्याय के विरुद्ध संघर्ष ही संघर्ष किया, कभी किसी मन्दिर में जाकर मण्डी बनाने के बतले दुश्मन की ईट से ईट बना दी, कभी किसी मूर्ति की आरती उतारने के बदले अत्याचारी शिशुपाल की गरदन की उतार दी, उसी क्रान्तिद्रष्टा कृष्ण को उसके अकारण चेलों ने मन्दिर में गूर्ति बनाकर खड़ा कर दिया उसके पैरों में घुंघरू बांध दिये, हाथ से सुदर्शन चक्र छीन कर बांसुरी पकड़ा दी और लगे चेले-चेलियों के साथ थिरकते रासलीला में। किसी गरीब दलित की कमसिन बेटी को जोगिन और देवदसी बनाकर मन्दिर परिसर में की उसका देह-शोषण करने के लिए बाह्याणवादी पुजारी के पास इससे सरल मार्ग भी क्या हो सकता था ? नाथद्वारा

के ऐतिहासिक मन्दिर में दलितों के प्रवेश पर लगे प्रतिबन्ध को तोड़ने के लिए जब हगने लगातार दो वर्ष संघर्ष किया तब पता चला कि ६०० साल पहले कुदावन से लाई श्रीनाथ की प्रतिमा को नाथद्वारा के मन्दिर में किसी दलित एवं शोषित द्वारा छुना तो दूर, देखना भी वर्जित था। खू सकते थे या देख सकते थे तो कौन ? बर्खाई और गुजरात के धन्ना सेठ जो उन हजारों पण्डों को पाल सकते थे जिनका नियम्रति का काम था शुद्ध धी के तीन कुंओं से तम्प द्वारा घी निकालकर, सोने की चाकियों में केसर पीसकर पाँच-पाँच सौ रूपये के एक-एक लड्डू से कृष्ण भगवान को भोग लगाना और शक्तों को आशीर्वाद देना कि लूटो, जितना लूट सकते हो देश को, चूसो, जितना चूस सकते हो खून गरिब का, पर मन्दिर में आकर मस्था टेकते ही तुम्हारे पाप कट जायेंगे और मिलेगा तुम्हें स्वर्ग का वीजा लगा पासपोर्ट !

जिस राम ने रावण जैसे निशाचरों के नाश का बचपन में ही संकल्प लेकर घोषणा की धी-निशिचर हीन करहुं मही भुज उठाया प्रण कीन्ह, उस राम को भी जड़ मूर्ति में बदलकर आयोध्या में ठुकराते सजा लीं। आज भी यहाँ १५ मन्दिर ऐसे हैं जिनका प्रत्येक पुजारी यह दावा करता है कि राम का असली जन्म स्थान उसी का मन्दिर है। पर राम के नकली ठेकेदार एक सोलहवें मन्दिर के लिए तड़प रहे हैं। अन्याय से लड़ने का नाम था राम, अन्याय से लड़ने का नाम था कृष्ण, पर राम और कृष्ण के पुजारियों का काम रह गया है-हरे रामा हरे कृष्ण, कृष्णा कृष्णा हरे हरे विल्लाना और अन्याय देखकर उससे लड़कर मिटाने के बदले आराम से समझौता कर लेना। बहुत जोश उठा तो तशहरे पर अन्याय पर न्याय की जीत के नाम पर किसी असली रावण के बदले कामज के नकली रावण को फूंक कर नाच लेना। रोज-रोज समाज में शोषण करने वाले अन्यायी रावणों को इससे अच्छा क्या चाहिए ?

धर्म की इसी विकृति का परिणाम है कि धन-प्रेमवर्ष की देवी लक्ष्मी को सबसे ज्यादा पूजा करने वाला भारत ही दुनियाँ का सबसे गरीब देश है। विद्या की देवी सरस्वती की सबसे ज्यादा पूजा करने वाला भारत ही दुनिया के सबसे अधिक अनपढ़, अंगूठा छाप लोगों का देश है।

धर्म की विकृति का शिकार केवल हिन्दू ही हुआ हो ऐसा भी नहीं है। पत्थर-पूजा एवं मूर्ति-पूजा के विरुद्ध प्रचण्ड विद्रोह के रूप में उभारे इलगा में भी कब्रें पूजी जाती हैं, गजारों पर चादरें चढ़ती हैं और हज



डी.एम.के. नेता श्री स्थालीन के साथ स्वामी अग्निवेश जी



केरला के मुख्यमंत्री श्री पिनरयी विजयन जी के साथ स्वामी अग्निवेश जी

करने वाले हज यात्री काबा में, या तो किसी पक्षर की सात बार परिक्रमा करते हैं या किसी पक्षर (हजूल हसद या हजूल यमानी) को चूमते हैं या फिर कंकड़ पक्षर शैतान पर फेंक कर अपने मजहबी उसूलों को दफन कर देते हैं। मुझे सबसे ज्यादा तरस उस समय आता है जब किसी ईद, बकरीद पर **कुरबानी** के नाम पर जीवन से विलासिता त्यागकर, ऐयाशी की संस्कृति के खिलाफ विद्रोहका झण्डा बुलन्द करने के बदले मुसलमान किसी निरीह मेमने या बकरे को धीरे-धीरे काटकर इलाल कर देता है और बुरी तरह छटपटाते हुए मेमने को सुनाता है- **विस्मिला हिर रहमानिरहीम !** जब रहमत का, कुरबानी का, दया और करुणा का यह अंदाज हो तो बाकी का अन्दाज प लगा सकते हैं। मुहर्न के दिन कागाज के ताजिये उठा, सवारी में नारे लगते हैं-हाय हुसैन हम न हुए ! इसके बदले जिस हजरत इमाम हुसैन ने कबला के मैदान में जिस ऐयाश, अत्याचारी यजीद के खिलाफ संघर्ष में शहादत दी थी उसी तरह गली के कोने पर खड़े श्रद्ध यजीवों को लोग ललकारते और संघर्ष में जरूरत पड़ती तो इमाम साहब की तरह शहीद हो जाते ! न्या आश्चर्य है कि जिस अनुपात से हर साल कागाज के नकली रावणों को जलाने का और कागजी ताजियों के बीच मुहर्न की सवारी का रिवाज बढ़ रहा है उसी अनुपात से समाज में असली रावणों और असली यजीवों की भी तादाद बढ़ रही है।

रोमन साम्राज्य के अन्त्या से टकराने वाले अदय साहसी जीजस सूली पर शहीद हो जाते हैं और लाखों शोषितों में संघर्ष की आग सुला देते हैं पर कितने दुस्साहस से पादरी और पोप इस प्रेरणादायक शहादत को जीजस के पुनर्जीवित होने की कहानी गढ़कर झुठला देते हैं और अन्त्या से संघर्ष करने के बदले लाखों-करोड़ों ईसाईयों को केवल ईशु पर ईमान लाने की बात बताते हैं। ईसाईयों का इतिहास भी पाखण्ड, अन्धविश्वास और चमत्कारों का वैसा ही मोहताज है जितने अन्य सभी मत, सम्प्रदाय, पन्थ और रिलीजन हैं। वास्तव में इन मजहबों ने धर्म की परिभाषा ही बदल कर रख दी है। यही कारण है कि हर मजहब उपसम्प्रदायों में बँटता चला गया। हिन्दू धर्म ही नहीं, बौद्ध, जैन, इस्लाम, ईसाइयत सभी इस विभाजन के शिकार होकर अपनी विस्मनीयता को दौंव पर लगा बैठे हैं।

धर्म का मर्म निरूपित करते हुए गोविन्द सिंह जी ने प्रार्थना की थी- **देहि शिवा वर मोहि इहै, शुभकर्मन तों कवहुँ न तरौ**
न न डरौं अरि सों जब जाय लरौं, निरचय कर अपनी जीत करौं
 अपने चार जवान बेटों को शहादत का वसन्ती चोला पहनाने वाले इस तेजस्वी गुरु के चेले आज खालसा और सिखों के नाम पर किसी अन्त्या का मुकाबला करने की जगह गुरद्वारों पर संगमर्मर के महों

पक्षर और गुम्बद पर सोने की पालिश लगाने की होड़ में पड़े हैं। गुरु तेग बहादुर और बंदा वैरागी की सेना के सिपाहियों की तलवारों में जंग लग चुकी है और सारा धर्म कर्म पंचककारों में सिमट कर रह गया है।

इन सभी लक्षणों को देखकर साफ लगता है कि धर्म के आडम्बर में अधर्म फलफूल रहा है और अधर्मके साये में अन्त्या दन्दना रहा है। धर्म के आडम्बर का और अन्त्या के ठेकेदारों का एक अलिखित समझौता समाज में लागू है। मनुष्यों द्वारा मनुष्य के शोषण और प्रकृति के निर्मम दोहन से अर्जित नाजायज धन का एक हिस्सा बहुत सलीके से धर्म के आडम्बर का और अन्त्या के ठेकेदारों का एक हिस्सा बहुत सलीके से धर्म के आडम्बर को बनाये रखने में खर्च हो जाता है और राज-मठ-और सेठ का नापाक गठजोड़ यथास्थितिवाद का पोषक बना रहता है। शायद ऐसे ही खुदा और उसके बंदों को देखकर शायर रो पड़ता है :

**खुदा के बंदों को देखकर, खुदा से मुनकिर हुई है दुनिया
 कि ऐसे बंदे हैं जिस खुदा के, वो कोई अच्छा खुदा नहीं**

शायद इसीलिये कार्लमार्क्स जैसे मनीषी को ऐसे धर के संगठित गिरोहके विरुद्ध बगावत करनी पड़ी। साम्यवाद का इन्कलाब तेवर जिस तेजी से ज्वालापुखी की तरह धधकता सामने आया सारे धर्माचार्य प्रकम्पित हो गये और तब उन्हें लगा कि आपस में चाहे कितने मतभेद हों, साम्यवाद को नास्तिकवाद बताकर उसे समान कर देने के लिए वे सभी एक हो जायें ! उन्होंने इस तथ्य को बड़े सुविधाजनक तरीके से भुला दिया कि करुणा, न्याय, समता पर आधारित साम्यवादी व्यवस्था इन तथाकथित धर्मों की तुलना में कहीं अधिक आध्यात्मिक थी, कहीं अधिक मानवीय मूल्यों पर आधारित थी। यदि ईश्वर की प्रचलित अवधारणा को नकारने मात्र से मार्क्स और लेनिन का साम्यवाद नास्तिक और निन्दनीय हो गया तो सिद्धार्थ गौतम का बौद्ध धर्म और भगवान महावीर का जैन धर्म धार्मिक कैसे हो सकते हैं ? बौद्ध मत में जिस तरह सूक्ष्म संवेदनाओं का देखते-देखते साधक समता में स्थित होता स्थितप्रज्ञ हो जाता है उसी तरह मार्क्सवाद के वैज्ञानिक सिद्धान्तों की सूक्ष्म कसौटी पर वैयक्तिक स्वाभिव्यक्ति का अधिकार समाप्त होकर, निकृष्ट पूंजीवाद को बदलकर, समता पर आधारित समाजवादी व्यवस्था का जन्म दे देता है। एक के पास समता अन्दर है तो दूसरे के पास समता बाहर समाज में लागू है।

पर यहाँ यह जान लेना भी जरूरी है कि न तो केवल धार्मिक साधना के तरीके से व्यक्ति व्यक्ति के हृदय को समता में स्थापित किया जा सकता है और न ही उत्पादन सम्बन्धों को बदल देने से अपने आप व्यक्ति का हृदय परिवर्तन हो जाता है। धर्मों के बावजूद समाज में घोर अन्त्याचारी विषमता व्याप्त रहती है और उधर क्रान्तिकारी समाजवादी व्यवस्था की स्थापना के बावजूद भी व्यक्ति अन्दर से राग और द्वेष की काम, क्रोध, लोभ, मोह आदि विषय-वासनाओं की जकड़-पकड़ में अंदर से टूटा रहता है। यही वजह भी है कि रूस और चीन आदि देशों में समाजवादी क्रान्ति के बाद भी व्यक्ति पूंजीवादी-भोगवादी वासनाओं से मुक्त नहीं हो पाया और यह अधूरापन ही साम्यवाद की नींव को खोखला कर रहा है। यही यह प्रश्न उठता है कि क्या कोई ऐसी व्यवस्था हो सकती है जिसमें व्यक्ति के अन्दर की समता और समाज में बाहर की समता का समन्वय हो ? एक तरफ व्यक्ति ऐन्द्रिय वासनाओं और उपभोक्तावादी प्रवृत्तियों से ऊपर उठता

जाय और दूसरी ओर समाज में जांवागत विषमता तथा अन्याय को समाप्त करने की ऊर्जा बनी रहे ?

शायद यही हमारे आज के युग की सबसे बड़ी चुनौती है। इस चुनौती को स्वीकार करने के लिए सारी दुनिया में कुछ ऐसे लोगों की जरूरत है जो धर्मों के रूढ़िवादी चिन्तन एवं कर्मकाण्डों से बाहर आएं। दूसरी ओर मार्क्सवाद भी एक (आर्थिक) धर्म के रूप में रूढ़ियों से ग्रस्त हो गया है और उसका वैज्ञानिकसमाजवाद का नारा खोखला हो गया है। तीसरी ओर स्वयं विज्ञान भी बड़ी तेजी से निय नये सत्य की ओर अग्रसर है। कार्लमार्क्स के समय का डार्विनिज्म जहाँ वैज्ञानिक चिन्तन का खरा नहीं उतर रहा। वहीं न्यूटन और डाल्टन के युग का सुक्ष्मातिसूक्ष्म एटम (पैटर) आइन्स्टीन के सपेक्षवाद से गुजर कर आज के क्वान्टम फ़िज़िक्स में एक तरंग (वेवलेथ) मात्र रह गया है। सीलिड पार्किन्सल ठोस परमाणु विमर्जित हो चुका है। उधर बहाल को सीमित मानने वाला विज्ञान आज उसे अनन्त मानने के लिए विवश हो रहा है। क्यों नहीं, कुछ सच्चे-उदार एवं प्रामाणिक धार्मिक, कुछ सच्चे, उदार, प्रामाणिक मार्क्सवादी और कुछ सच्चे उदार आधुनिक एवं प्रामाणिक वैज्ञानिक साथ बैठते और तीनों श्रेणी के लोग एक-दूसरे को शक की नजर से देखने के बदले परस्पर पूरक होने की भावना से खुला संवाद स्थापित करते ? एकांगी चिन्तन के बदले सर्वांगीण होना जरूरी है सांगोपांग और समन्वयवादी होना समीचीन है।

इस संवाद को ही हम एक नई आध्यात्मिक समाजवादी व्यवस्था की शुरुआत कहेंगे। इस महान् ऐतिहासिक पहल के लिए आज मैं एक बहुत ही विनम्र भाव से **एक सुझाव के रूप में वैदिक वर्णाश्रम धर्म की चर्चा कर रहा हूँ**। वेदों में वर्णित इस समाज-व्यवस्था का कोई स्पष्ट इतिहास तो नहीं है पर कुछ चिन्ह कहीं कहीं अवश्य दिखाई पड़ते हैं। कालान्तर में जब यह व्यवस्था श्रष्ट हुई तो इसको मूल रूप में ले जाने की भी युगान्तरकारी कोशिशें हुईं। पाँच हजार वर्ष पहले योगिराज कृष्ण ने गीता के माध्यम से यह प्रयास किया।

आज से लगभग १५० वर्ष पहले एक क्रान्ति द्रष्टा सन्यासी

दयानन्द ने इसे अपनी विचार-सरणी का मुख्य सम्बल बनाया और इसी की सरल व्याख्या, वेदों के अप्रतिम विद्वान् स्वामी समर्पणानन्द जी (पूर्वनाम बुद्धदेव विद्यालंकार) ने अपनी प्रसिद्ध पुस्तक **कायाकल्प** में की। मैंने स्वयं शिष्यभाव में समर्पणानन्द जी के चरणों में बैठकर जो कुछ सीखा, उसे मैं प्रस्तुत कर रहा हूँ।

आर्य समाज के प्रवर्तक महर्षि दयानन्द रूढ़िवाद और कट्टरवाद के प्रबल विरोधी थे और इसीलिए उन्होंने आर्य समाज के दस नियमों में एक विशेष नियम बनाया :-

सत्य के ग्रहण करने और असत्य को छोड़ने में सर्वदा उद्यत रहना चाहिये।

हमारे चिन्तन के लिए भी यही आधार हो ऐसी मेरी प्रार्थना है। इसी के साथ स्वास्थ्य चिन्तन परम्परा की स्थापना के ऋषिदेव ने जो तीन मन्त्र दिये, उन्हें मैं अंग्रेजी के तीन डी के रूप में प्रतिष्ठित करता हूँ।

..(सवाल करना)

..(बहस करना)

..(जरूरत पड़ने पर असहमति दर्ज करना)

तो आइये देखते हैं : वेद में वर्णित समाज-व्यवस्था का रूप।

कतिपय पाश्चात्य विद्वानों के दुराग्रहपूर्ण दृष्टिकोण से मुक्त हुआ जा सके तो यहस्पष्ट है कि वेदों में इतिहास और भूगोल ढूँढना गलत होगा। भारतीय आर्य विद्वानों का एक स्वर से यह मत है कि **वेद का ईश्वरीय ज्ञान मानवमात्र के कल्याण के लिए है**। न उसमें जातिपाति या ऊँच-नीच है और न ही भारत अथवा अन्य किसी देश का विशेष दर्जा। उसमें वर्णित आर्य शब्द का अभिप्राय न उत्तर-भारतीय से है, न ही किसी अन्य नस्ल से।

आर्य शब्द ऋग्वेदो धातु से बना है जिसका सीधा, सरल अर्थ हुआ ज्ञान, गमन और प्राप्ति। जो भी व्यक्ति परमात्मा की इस सृष्टि में गतिशील है, क्रियाशील है, कर्मशील है वही आर्य है। आर्य का संघर्ष समस्त वैदिक वाङ्मय में किसी हिन्दू अथवा मुसलमान से नहीं अपितु दस्यु से है और यजुर्वेद के अनुसार दस्यु कौन है तो उत्तर मिला **अकर्माः दस्युः** जो कर्म नहीं करता, दूसरों की कमाई पर, शोषण पर



स्वामी रामदेव व अन्नाहज़ारे के साथ स्वामी अग्निवेश जी



प्रेस बार्ता में स्वामी अग्निवेश जी साथ में प्रो. विष्णु राव आर्य मंत्री सांविधिक सभा व श्री विजय प्रताप जी

जीत है वह दस्यु है अर्थात् डाकू है । आर्य को मोटे शब्दों में कमेरा कह सकते हैं और दस्यु को लुटेरा ।

अब आगे वेद में स्पष्ट आया है :

ओ३म् इन्द्रं वर्धन्तौ अप्सुरः कृषन्तो विश्वमार्यम् अपथन्तो अराणाः ?

-ऋग् ९-६३-५

जिसका सीधा अर्थ हुआ अपने राज्य रूपी ऐश्वर्य का वित्सार करते हुए, संसार के मेहनत करने वाले श्रेष्ठ पुरुषों ! एक हो जाओ और कंजूस, शोषक प्रवृत्ति के लोगों का संहार कर दो ।

उपरोक्त उद्धरण में किसी को कार्लमार्क्स की प्रसिद्ध उक्ति **Proletariates of the world unite, establish the dictatorship of the proletariat and expropriate the expropriators** प्रतिध्वनित होती हो तो इसे मैं सहज संयोग ही कहूँगा क्योंकि न तो वेदों की रचना मार्क्स के बाद हुई, न ही कार्ल मार्क्स ने वेद पढ़कर अपनी बात कही होगी । अस्तु ! आमतौर से धार्मिक जगत् पर कर्मफल सिद्धान्त का हवाला देकर यह आरोप लगाता है कि यह गरीबी-अमीरी, ऊँच-नीच के भेदभाव को पिछले जन्म के कर्मों का फल बताकर औचित्य प्रदान करता है । पर वेद में तो स्पष्ट आदेश है :

कृतं मे दक्षिणे हस्ते, जयो मे सव्य आहितः । -अथर्ववेद ७-५१-८

दहिने हाथ से पुरुषार्थ करो और बायें से फल प्राप्त करो और यदि कोई तुमसे काम तो ले ले परदाग न दे तो क्या हाथ पर हाथ धरे अपने पिछले जन्म के किन्हीं अशुभ कर्मों का फल मान लो अथवा अपना अधिकार प्राप्ति हेतु संघर्ष ?

वैदिक ऋचाओं का हिन्दी पद्यानुवाद करने वाले प्रसिद्ध कवि बशीर अहमद मधुख के शब्दों में :

**बह समाज का शोषणकर्ता,
धन केन्द्रित कर लिया कि जिसने,
निज हाथों में पाँयों जन का,
उसको पहचानो रे ।**

**वीर्यों ! नष्ट करो उस जनद्रोही को,
दिव्य विजलियाँ बनकर उस पर टूट पड़ो रे**

शोषण और विषागता की व्यवस्था के खिलाफ इससे अधिक प्रचण्ड उद्योष क्या हो सकता है ? व्यक्तिवाद और उपभोक्तावाद की चूलों खिला ने वाला मन्त्र भी देखिये- **केवलायो भवति केवलादी** अर्केला खाने

वाला पाप की कमाई खाता है ।

किसी समाजव्यवस्था में सबसे अहम् प्रश्न होगा कि उत्पादन और वितरण के साधनों का स्वामी कौन होगा ? दूसरे शब्दों में क्या सम्पत्ति पर वैयक्तिक स्वामित्व होगा अथवा राज्य का अथवा समाज का ? इन प्रश्नों पर वेद में एक बार नहीं, हजार बार यह स्पष्ट है कि सम्पत्ति व्यक्तिगत स्वामित्व में नहीं अपितु समाज के सामूहिक स्वामित्व में होनी चाहिये :

**ओ३म् ईशावास्यं इदं सर्वं यत्किञ्चित् जगत्पाम् जगत्
तेन त्वक्तेन भुञ्जीथाः मा गृधः कस्य खिद्धनम् ? -यजुर्वेद ४०-१**
ओ३म् समानी प्रया सह वो अन्नभागः समाने योवने
सहवो युनक्ति सम्यञ्चोऽग्निं सपर्यतारा नाभिभिर्वाभितः ।

गुरु नानक देव जी जब-बड़के खा ते दब के वाह बांट कर खाओ और जमकर परिश्रम करो-कह रहे थे तो वे वेद की इन ऋचाओं का ही आम जनता की भाषा में अनुवाद कर रहे थे-

सहनाववतु सहनो भुनक्तु सह वीर्यम् कर्वावहै ।

तेजस्विनावधीतमस्तु । मा विद्विषावहै । -कठोपनिषद्-२-६-१९

इस तरह हम यह पाते हैं कि वाणिश्रम-व्यावसाय आज की मौजूदा जातिवादी-व्यवस्था के ठीक विपरीत है । आज की शोषण, अन्याय एवं विषमता पर आधारित व्यक्तिवादी विचारधारा को नकारती, ठुकराती वर्णाश्रम-व्यवस्था न्याय, सहयोग एवं समता पर आधारित समष्टिवादी विचारधारा है । आज के योगवादी-भौतिकवादी-यान्त्रिकी मूल्यों की जगह वर्णाश्रम त्यागपूर्वक भोगने, सदा जीवन उच्च विचारकी संस्कृति को बढ़ावा देती है और बच्ये से लेकर बूढ़े तक प्रतिक्षण, प्रत्येक व्यक्ति को उसके जीवन के प्रति आस्था के साथ-साथ आध्यात्मिक मूल्यों को सामाजिक-आर्थिक-राजनैतिक व्यवस्थाओं की धुरी पर प्रतिष्ठित करती है । इन सबसे बड़ी बात तो यह है कि वाणिश्रम-व्यवस्था रूढ़िवादी धर्मों की कैद से ईश्वर को मुक्त करती है और समाज-परिवर्तन की प्रेरक शक्ति बनाती है ।

अपनी बात को रेखांकित करने के उद्देश्य से मैं अन्त में सत्यार्थ प्रकाश के अन्तिम पृष्ठों से गनुष्ठता को परिभाषित करने वाला गद्यशिर्ष दयानन्द का यह सबसे अधिक तेजस्वी वाक्य उद्धृत करना चाहूँगा

मनुष्य उसी को कहना कि जो मननशील होकर स्वात्मवत् अन्यो के सुख-दुःख और हानि-लाभ को समझे । अन्यवकारी बलवान से भी न डरे और धर्मात्मा निर्बल से भी डरता रहे । इतना ही नहीं किन्तु अपने सर्वसामर्थ्य से धर्मात्माओं-कि चाहे व महा अनाथ, निर्बल और गुणरहित व्यों न हों-उनकी रक्षा, उन्नति और प्रियावरण और अथर्मी चाहे चक्रवर्ती, सनाथ, महाबलवान औरगुणवान भी ही तथापि उसका नाश, अवनाति और अप्रियावरण सदा किया करे अर्थात् जहाँ तक हो सके वहाँ तक अन्यायकारियों के बल की हानि और न्यायकारियों के बल की उन्नति सर्वथा किया करे । इस काम में चाहे उसको कितना ही दारुण-दुःख प्राप्त हो, चाहे प्राण भी भले ही जावें, परन्तु इस मनुष्यपनरूप धर्म से पृथक् कभी न होंवे ।”

आर्य समाजवाद और भाग्यवाद

प्रश्न : क्या आप पुनर्जन्म का सिद्धान्त मानते हैं ?

उत्तर : मानते हैं ।

प्रश्न : क्या आप कर्मफलका सिद्धान्त भी मानते हैं ?

उत्तर : मानते हैं ।

प्रश्न : तो फिर आपको यह भी मानना पड़ेगा कि आज हमें अपने समाज में जो आर्थिक विषमता दिखाई पड़ रही है अमीर-गरीब के बीच जो खाई दिखाई पड़ रही है, उसका मूल कारण पूँजीवादी अर्थव्यवस्था आदि न होकर पिछले जन्म के कर्मों का फल है । कर्मफल का सिद्धान्त यह बताता है कि जो व्यक्ति जैसा कर्म करता है उसको अगले जन्म में वैसा ही फल मिलता है । इस सिद्धान्त को कोई टाल नहीं सकता । आज जो गरीब हैं, भूखे हैं, नंगे हैं, दुःखी हैं उन्होंने अवश्य अपने पिछले जन्मों में बहुत बुरे कर्म किए होंगे- इसीलिए परमात्मा ने इस जन्म में उन्हें यह दण्ड दिया है जो उन्हें अवश्य शुभात्मना पड़ेगा । इसी प्रकार जिन लोगों ने पिछले जन्म में शुभ कर्म किए थे उन्हें परमात्मा की कृपा से अपार धन-दौलत और तद्जन्य सुख-सुविधा की प्राप्ति होती है । इसे पूँजीवाद और शोषण आदि कहना ईश्वरीय न्याय-व्यवस्था का अपमान करना है । जब आप पहले मान चुके हैं कि आर्य समाजवाद में क्यूनियन की तरह नास्तिकता नहीं है और आप ईश्वर तथा आत्मा की सत्ता को स्वीकार करते हैं तो फिर आपको यह भी मानना चाहिए कि यह गरीबी और अमीरी का भेद हमारे आपके चाहने या न चाहने पर निर्भर नहीं करता वरन् परमात्मा की न्याय-व्यवस्था के अनुसार चलता है । और हमें इसमें कोई दखल नहीं देना चाहिए।

उत्तर : जब परमात्मा ने आपको नंगा पैदा किया था तो आपने कपड़े पहन कर उसकी न्याय-व्यवस्था में दखल क्यों दिया ? जब परमात्मा ने आपको अनपढ़ पैदा किया था तो आपने पढ़ना-लिखना सीखकर उसकी न्याय-व्यवस्था में दखल क्यों किया ? जब आप भूखे, नंगे और अनपढ़ पैदा होकर भी अपनी हालतों में परिवर्तन करने का प्रयास करते हैं तब आपको उसी तरह सारे समाज की हालत को भी बदलने का प्रयास करना चाहिए । इस तरहके प्रयासों को परमात्मा की न्याय-व्यवस्था में दखल नहीं माना जा सकता । बल्कि परमात्मा ने तो हमें कर्म करने की स्वतन्त्रता प्रदान की है, हमें बुद्धि दी है, हमें बल दिया है और पुरुषार्थ की प्रबल प्रेरणा दी है । इसके साथ ही परमात्मा ने हमें वेद के माध्यम से यह ज्ञान दिया है कि हम समाजवाद के रास्ते चलकर अभ्युदय और निःश्रेयस् का मार्ग प्रशस्त करें । कर्म फल के सिद्धान्त का यह अर्थ कदापि नहीं है कि हम अपनी परिस्थितियों में परिवर्तन के लिए कर्म ही न करें और सबकुछ ईश्वर की व्यवस्था पर छोड़कर आर्थिक-शोषण और विषमता को भाग्यवाद के मध्ये मढ़ दें । कर्मफल का सिद्धान्त तो उल्टे हमें इस बात की प्रेरणा देता है कि यदि हम इस शोषण और विषमता को मिटाने के लिए कर्म करें तो यह अवश्य मिटकर रहेगी और आर्य समाजवाद रूपी फल भी अवश्य मिलेगा ।

प्रश्न : तो क्या आप भाग्य पर भी विश्वास नहीं करते ? जिसके भाग्य में जो लिखा है उसे कोई मिटा नहीं सकता । जिसे आप आर्थिक विषमता कहते हैं-वह भाग्य की देन है । कर्म तो आदमी बाद में करेगा-पर जब जन्म ही एक गरीब परिवार में लेगा तो उसे गरीबी के सारे कष्ट उठाने ही पड़ेंगे-दूसरी ओर एक बालक अमीर के घर में पैदा

होकर बिना किसी कर्म के उसके करोड़ों की सम्पत्ति कोठी, कार आदि का उत्तराधिकारी बन जाता है-यह सब भाग्य का चक्कर नहीं है तो और क्या है ?

उत्तर : यह कोई भाग्य का चक्कर नहीं है वरन् सामाजिक एवं आर्थिक अन्याय है । योयता आदि की परख किए बिना किसी परिवार विशेष में जन्म लेने के कारण गरीब या अमीर बन जाने वाली बात नितान्त पूँजीवादी दुर्व्यावस्था की उपाज है । यदि ऐसी दुर्व्यावस्था भाग्य के नाम पर पनप रही हो तो ऐसे भाग्यसे भी लड़ना और अपने पुरुषार्थ से उसे बदल डालना हमारा कर्तव्य है । इस सबबन्ध में निर्देश करते हुए सुप्रसिद्ध वैदिक विद्वान स्वामी समार्णानन्द जी कायाकल्प में लिखते हैं कि

“जो बात सत्यासत्य विवेक सहृदय लोगों को अखरती है, वह यह है कि वह पूँजी बिना परीक्षा के उस पूँजीपति के पुत्र को क्यों मिले और दुरुपयोग-पर-दुरुपयोग करने पर भी उसके हाथों में क्यों पड़ी रहें ?”

“इसका उत्तर बहुत से लोग विधाता का विधान, कर्मफल, भाग्य अथवा ईश्वाराज्ञा के नाम से देते हैं । ईश्वर के सबसे बड़े शत्रु उसके यह भाग्यवादी भक्त हैं । वे भूल जाते हैं कि जिस भगवान ने हमें विशेष अवस्थाओं में जन्म दिया है उसी ने हमें उन्हें अपने अनुकूल करने की शक्ति और आदेश भी तो दिया है । हाथ, पैर, आँख, नाक, कान और इन सबसे बड़कर सिर यह सब मूल्यवान् सम्पत्ति भगवान ने भाग्य से लड़कर उसे जीतने के लिए ही दी है ।” भगवान ने कहने से भाग्य से लड़कर उसे जीतने के लिए ही दी है ।” भगवान ने कहा-

दृष्या दृषिरसि हेत्या हेतिरसि मेत्या मेनिरसि अपुहि श्रेयांसम् । अति समन्-क्रम

-अर्थ २-१-१

“अर्थात्, तू शान्तों को काटने वाला शस्त्र है, तू दूषणों को दूषित कर देने वाली गलाशक्ति है, तू चिन्ताओं का पहलें से चिन्तन करने वाला अनागत विधाता है । उठ ! जो तेरे साथ की पंक्ति में है उन्हें पीछे छोड़ और जो अगली पंक्ति में है उनमें जा मिल ।”

वह भगवान ही तो कहता है

कृतं मे दक्षिणेहस्ते जयो मे सव्य आहित । -अर्थ ७-५-१-८

अर्थात् हे मनुष्य ! सदा याद रख, पुरुषार्थ तेरे दाहिने हात में रहता है और विजय तेरे बांये हाथ में रहती है । भगवान का हाथ, पैर, सिर आदि शक्तियाँ हमें देना ही इस बात का प्रमाण है कि हमारा काम भाग्य से युद्ध करना है ।

प्रश्न : किन्तु स्वामी दयानन्द सरस्वती तो स्पष्ट रूप से गरीब-अमीर के बीच की खाई को पूर्वजन्म के कर्मों पर आधारित ईश्वरीय न्याय-व्यवस्था मानते हैं । उदाहरणके लिए सत्यार्थ प्रकाश के नवम समुल्लास में देखिए । वे मानते हैं कि जो पुण्यात्मा जीव है वह राजा के घर पैदा होकर सुखी रहता है और पापी जीव दसियारे के घर जलन्त होकर दारिद्र्य का दुःख भोगता है ।

उत्तर : इस प्रकार के उदाहरण को एकांगी रूप में लेने पर उपरोक्त भ्रम का होना स्वाभाविक है । पर किसी भी व्यक्ति की विचार धारा के प्रति न्याय करने के लिए यह आवश्यक है कि उसकी मूल विचारधारा को साझा जाय । स्वामी दयानन्द की गूल विचारधारा जना



स्वामी अग्निवेश जी को तेलुगु सन्तार्थ प्रकाश की प्रति भेंट करते हुए सभा मंत्री प्रो. विठ्ठल राव आर्य जी

पर आधारित व्यवस्थाओं के प्रति विद्रोहीवात्सक है। वे तो जन्म के आधार पर किसी का ब्राह्मण, क्षत्रिय आदि मानने को तैयार नहीं है। सारी व्यवस्था ही वे व्यक्ति के गुण कर्म, स्वभाव पर आधारित बनाना चाहते हैं। यहाँ तक कि विवाह आदि का सम्बन्ध भी योग्यतानुसार चाहते हैं और जो व्यक्ति जन्म के आधार पर माँ-बेटे और पिता-पुत्र के सम्बन्ध को बदल कर गुण, कर्म, स्वभावानुसार बनाना चाहता हो, उसके बारे में यह सोचना कि वे जन्मानुसार गरीबी, अमीरी की खाई का समर्थन करते हैं-योर अन्याय होगा। स्वामी दयानन्द की यह दृढ़ मान्यता है कि प्रारब्ध से पुरुषार्थ बलवान है- वे भाग्यवादी होने के बदले पुरुषार्थी होना श्रेयस्कर समझते हैं। देखो, सत्यार्थ प्रकाश के अन्त में स्वमन्त्रव्याप्तव्य प्रकाश में वे स्पष्ट लिखते हैं कि **पुरुषार्थ प्रारब्ध से बड़ा इसलिए है कि जिससे संचित प्रारब्ध बनते, जिसके सुधरने से सब सुधरते और जिसके बिगड़ने से सब बिगड़ते हैं, इसी से प्रारब्ध की अपेक्षा पुरुषार्थ बड़ा है।**

इसी बात को उर्दू का एक शाय कहता है-

**खुदी को कर बुलन्द इतना कि हर तकदीर से पहले।
खुदा बन्दे से खुद पूछे, बता तेरी रजा क्या है।**

प्रश्न : आप चाहे जितना पुरुषार्थ कर लें और चाहे जितना भाग्य से लड़ लें, आप विषमता को नहीं मिटा सकते। एक ही माँके दो बच्चों की योग्यता में अन्तर होता है। अनेक बच्चे जन्म से ही अंधे होते हैं। कई जन्म से कोढ़ी होते हैं-यह सब परमात्मा की लीला है। यह न्यायकारी है और जो भी करता है, ठीक ही करता है। आप आर्य समाजवाद तो क्या, इससे भी बड़ी कोई चीज ले आये पर दुनियाँ में सभी इन्सान कभी बराबर नहीं हो सकते क्योंकि सबकी अपनी-अपनी किस्मत है-अपना-अपना भाग्य है। कोई किस्मत ही कर ले। पाँचों उंगलियाँ कभी बराबर नहीं हो सकती। जब दुनियाँ में एक आदमी का चेहरा दूसरे से नहीं मिलता तो बाकी अन्तर भी नहीं मिटाया जा सकता।

उत्तर : चलिए, अपनी बात को मान भी लें कि विषमता को नहीं मिटाया जा सकता और प्रत्येक बच्चे की अलग-अलग योग्यता होती है तो भी विषमता का सही माप करने के लिए आपको आर्य समाजवाद का सहारा लेना ही पड़ेगा। जब तक आप सभी बच्चों को शिक्षा के क्षेत्र में उन्नति के समान अवसर उपलब्ध नहीं करायेगे

तो यहकैसे पता लगा पायेगे कि इनमें तेज बुद्धि का कौन है और मन्द बुद्धि का कौन है। स्कूल में जब दीड़ की प्रतियोगिता होती है और मास्टर जी यह जानना चाहते हैं कि इन सभी बच्चों में कौन सबसे तेज दीड़ सकता है (जब वे सभी बच्चों को एकचूने की लकीर पर खड़ा करते हैं और एक साथ दीड़ने के लिए सीटी बजाते हैं- ऐसा करके वे दीड़ने वालों में प्रथम, द्वितीय, तृतीय आदि का क्रिसला कर पाते हैं। सब यदि एक ही लकीर पर खड़े होने के बदले एक बालक अपने साथियों से आगे खड़ा हो जाए तो क्या उसका वास्तविक योग्यता का पता चल सकता है ? सबको एक लाइन पर खड़ा करना अथवा सभी नागरिकों को उन्नति के समान अवसर प्रदान करना समाजवाद की बुनियादी शर्त है। इसके बिना जो विषमता है वह उचित नहीं है। जैसे आज हमारे देश में अमीरों के बच्चों की पढ़ाई तो दूर, भूख से छटपटाने पर रोटी भी नहीं मिलती। इस अन्याय पूर्ण व्यवस्था में यह कहना कि अमीर के बच्चों में अधिक योग्यता है क्योंकि उन्होंने पिछले जन्म में शुभ कर्म किए हैं, सशस्त्र पूंजीवाद की दलाली है। यदि आपके पास निश्चिन्त ऊँचाई वाले दस झण्डे हैं तो उनकी विभिन्नता अथवा विषमता को आप उन झण्डों को समान धरातल पर खड़ा करके ही जान सकेंगे अन्यथा नहीं।

अब रहा सवाल जन्म से अन्धे या कोढ़ी आदि होने का। इस बात को भी कर्मों का फल मानकर चुप नहीं बैठा जा सकता। इसके कारणों का पता लगाना पड़ेगा। हो सकता है यह माँ-बाप की वजह से हो, हो सकता है यह प्रजनन सम्बन्धी किसी दोष के कारण हो। कारण का पता लगाकर उसे दूर करने का प्रयत्न करना चाहिए। हमारे समाज में बहुत सी बीमारियाँ होती थीं जिन्हें किसी देवी, माता आदि का कोप माना जाता था और परिणामस्वरूप हजारों-लाखों लोग उचित चिकित्सा के अभाव में मर जाते थे और लोग तकदीर की दुहाई देकर मन को समझा लेते थे। पर जब से इसका इलाज होने लगा है, न जाने वह देवी और तकदीर कहाँ रफू हो गये।

यह भी बात ध्यान देने की है कि आर्य समाजवाद दुनियाँ के हर इन्सान को एकदम बराबर करने की बात नहीं कहता पर



अग्निहोत्र आश्रम में स्वामी अग्निवेश जी की अंगवस्त्र के बाद अग्निहोत्र आश्रम में स्थित स्वामी जी के कमरे में यज्ञ करते हुए सार्वदेशिक सभा के प्रधान स्वामी आर्यवेश जी एवं गनी प्रो. विठ्ठल राव जी आर्य, स्वामी विजयवेश जी, श्री धर्मोद जी व श्री अशोक जी



अग्नितीर्थक अभ्रम में स्वामी अग्निवेश जी की अंत्येष्टी के बाद शान्ति यज्ञ करते हुए, सावित्रीशिव सभा के प्रधान स्वामी आर्यदेश जी एवं मंत्री प्रो. विठ्ठल राव आर्य जी

आर्थिक विषमता को कम करके, उत्पादन के साधनों का समाजीकरण करके, शिक्षा आदि को निःशुल्क करके और रोजगार का मौलिक अधिकार देकर वह इंसान और इंसान के बीच की लम्बी चौड़ी खाई को पाटकर एक ऐसी व्यवस्था का निर्माण करना चाहता है जिसमें

यह सारा मानव-समाज एक परिवार के सदस्यों के रूप में रह सके और **वसुधैव कुटुम्बकम्** का स्वप्न साकार हो सके। जैसे परिवार में योग्यता और आवश्यकता के अनुसार विभिन्न सदस्यों की उपभोग सामग्री में थोड़ा-बहुत अन्तर तो हो सकता है पर यह कदापि नहीं हो सकता कि एक सदस्य के पास तो उपभोग पदार्थों का भंडार हो और दूसरा दाने-दाने को मोहताज हो। पाँचों उंगलियों के बराबर न होने का सिद्धान्त हम भी मानते हैं पर इन पर इन पाँचों उंगलियों में सामान्य अथवा अति सामान्य सा ही अन्तर बर्दाश्त किया जाता है। यदि इन पाँचों में से कोई एक उंगली तो हो जाय दस फुट की और बाकी रह जाय दो-दो इंच की तो उस दस फुट वाली का अपरेशन तो करना ही पड़ेगा। इसी तरह चेहरे वाली बात है। यह ठीक है कि परमात्मा की इस अद्भुत सृष्टि में दुनियाँक कोई दो चेहरे एकदम समान नहीं हैं पर इसका मतलब यह भी नहीं कि लोगों के चेहरों में आकाश पाताल का अन्तर हो। यह तो हो सकता है कि किसी की नाक दो इंच लम्बी है तो दूसरे की ढाई इंच लम्बी हो पर ऐसा तो नहीं है कि सामान्य लोगों की नाक तो है डेढ़ इंच लम्बी और कुछ दस-बीस-पचास लोगों की नाक हो डेढ़ सौ फुट लम्बी !

हम यह पुनः कहना चाहते हैं कि आर्य समाजवाद आत्मा को मानता है और परमात्मा को भी मानता है, पुनर्जन्म को मानता है और कर्मफल को भी मानता है पर भाग्यवाद के ढकोसले को हर्निज-हर्निज नहीं मानता। आर्य समाजवाद जन्म-जन्मान्तों से जीवता पर पड़ रहे शृंशाशृंश कर्माँ के संस्कार को भी स्वीकार करता है और तद्जन्य मानसिक एवं आध्यात्मिक वैषम्य को भी स्वीकार करता है पर इस वैषम्य की आड़ में पनापने वाले आर्थिक एवं सामाजिक शोषण के पूंजीवादी पाखण्ड को कदापि स्वीकार नहीं करता।

भाग्यवाद आर्य समाजवाद का सबसे बड़ा दुश्मन है। इस देश में सामाजिक एवं आर्थिक क्रान्ति लाने के लिए इस भाग्यवाद रूपी दुश्मन को समाप्त करना अनिवार्य है

प्रश्न : आप इस भाग्यवाद को नहीं मानना चाहते तो बेशक न माने पर आप इसके पीछे लट्टू लेकर क्यों पड़ते हैं ?

उत्तर : इसके पीछे लट्टू ही नहीं, वर्ग भाला लेकर पड़ना होगा। हमारे देश की सोली-भाली गरीब और शोषित जनता को सदियों से इस भाग्यवाद का जहरीला घूँट पिला-पिलाकर इतना निस्तेज और नपुंसक बना दिया गया है कि वह उसकी खून चूसने वालों के खिलाफ क्रान्ति की आवाज बुलन्द करने के बदले आह करने में भी असमर्थ पाती है। जब भी हमने तथाकथित धर्म के ठेकेदारों को इस आर्थिक विषमता की चक्की में पिस रहे करोड़ों मेहनतकश लोगों की दर्दनाक जिन्दगी का कारण पूछा तो यही जवाब मिला कि इनका भाग्य खोटा है क्योंकि इन्होंने पिछले जन्मों में खोटे कर्म किए थे। और जब हमने किसी नालायक निकम्मे पूंजीपति को रंरलियों और रात के बारह-बारह बजे एयरकण्डिशन होटलों में अर्द्धनगार्ओं के साथ छलकते शराब के प्याला पर थिरकने का रहस्य पूछा तो यही जवाब मिला कि परमात्मा की लीला अपरम्पार है, इन्होंने पिछले जन्मों में इतना शुभ कर्म किया है कि बस, पूछो मत ! उसी की वजह से इनका भाग्य चमक रहा है और लक्ष्मी का इन पर वरदहस्त है। ऐसे अवसरों और पूंजीवाद के निकृष्ट दलालों को चौरास्ते पर किसी पेड़ से बांधकर, गरम-गरम लाल भाले को उनके पेट में घुसाया जाय और जब ये चरि़कार करके कहने लगे कि हमें क्याँ सताते हो तो बड़े प्यार से इनको समझा कर कहा जाय कि पण्डित जी ! हम अपनी ओर से कुछ नहीं कर रहे-यह तो आगको आगके पिछले जन्म के कर्मों का फल मिल रहा है।

जब तक इस भाग्यवाद के जहरीले कीड़े को इस निर्माता के साथ समाप्त नहीं किया जायेगा तब तक यह गरीब, शोषित और पीड़ित मानवता की जिन्दगी में इच्छलाब लाने के रास्ते में जबरदस्त रुकावट बनी रहेगी।

स्वामी अग्निवेश का जीवन संग्राम

सामयिक



प्रभात कुमार राय

भा

रात के स्वातंत्र्य संग्राम में गौरवशाली और शानदार किरादार निभाने वाले आर्यसमाज आंदोलन के क्षितिज पर सन 1970 में एक जवाजलय सितारे का उदय हुआ था, जिसको स्वामी अग्निवेश के नाम से दुनिया में पहचाना गया। विश्वघटल पर स्वामी अग्निवेश को लाखों बंधुआ मजदूरों का मुक्तिदाता। नोबेल सम्मान से अलंकृत बचपन बचाओ आंदोलन का प्रणेता। हिंदू-मुस्लिम के एकरा का प्रबल पैरोकार, धार्मिक कट्टरता का मुखर विरोधी और समाजवादी सिद्धांतों के प्रबल हिमायती के तौर पर जाना पहचाना जाता है। अग्निवेश के बहुआयामी व्यक्तित्व में गहन आध्यात्मिक और सांस्कृतिक चेतना, समाज सुधार की तीव्र लालच, समाजवादी राजनीतिज्ञ का आक्रोश एक साथ समाहित बना रहा। आर्यसमाज के प्राणेण में लाला हरदयल, करतार सिंह सराभा, लाला लाजपत राय, पं. रामप्रसाद बिरसिमल, अशफक उल्ला खान, चंद्रशेखर आजाद, भगत सिंह सराखे अनेक क्रांतिकारी किरदार परलवित और प्रशिक्षित हुए थे।

भले ही स्वामी अग्निवेश ने इस नश्वर संसार को अलविदा कह दिया है, किंतु उनका समाजवादी नजरिया, मेहनतकश मजदूरों के प्रति उनका गहन अनुराग सामाजिक एकाता के लिए समाजवादी भारत का सृजन करने के लिए प्रेरित करते रहेंगे।

नवाजा गया है। बंधुआ मुक्ति मोर्चा की अथक कोशिशों से संसद द्वारा बंधुआ विरोधी एक्ट पारित किया गया। जिसके तहत बंधुआ मजदूरों को मुजरिमों को कड़ी सजा का प्रावधान किया गया।

हिंदू मुसलिम एकाता और भाईचारे के लिए सदैव प्रयासरत रहे समाजवादी नजरिए के स्वामी अग्निवेश द्वारा 1987 में अंजाम दिए भेद द्रो के पश्चात दिल्ली से मेरठ तक अभिनेत्री शबाना अजमी, मजदूर नेता शंकरगुआ निचोंगी, अकाली लीडर जीवन सिंह उमाभंगल, असगर अली इंडीनियर, फ़िल्म लेखक-गीतकार जगोद अख्तर, साहित्यकार विष्णु प्रभाकर, निशांत न्यायदय मंच के प्रोफेसर शमसुल इस्लाम आदि सौ से अधिक विशिष्ट शख्सियतों को साथ लेकर शांति मार्च अंजाम दिया गया। 2002 में गुजरात में अंजाम दिए गए प्रातव्यापी विकसल सांप्रदायिक दलों के बाद अग्निवेश द्वारा अनेक प्रख्यात सामाजिक कार्यकर्ताओं के साथ संपूर्ण गुजरात में शांति मार्च आयोजित किया गया। देश भर के किसान आंदोलनों में स्वामी अग्निवेश की जबरदस्त शिरकात जीवनपर्यंत कायम बनी रही। 1990 के दशक में जंतर मंतर स्थित स्वामी अग्निवेश के कार्यालय में प्रायः देश के कोने-कोने से प्यारे किसान नेताओं का जमावड़ा प्रायः बना रहता था। 1987 में राजस्थान में राजकुंवर नामक महिला को जिंदा जलाकर सती कर दिया गया था। सती प्रथा के विरुद्ध अग्निवेश के नेतृत्व में आर्यसमाज द्वारा एक कामयाब अभियान संचालित किया गया और फलस्वरूप संसद द्वारा सती प्रथा के विषय में कई कानून का एक विधेयक पारित किया गया। 1988 में उदयपुर के नाथद्वारा मंदिर में दलितों के प्रवेश को लेकर अग्निवेश की कयादत में आर्य समाज द्वारा एक जबरदस्त सफल आंदोलन किया गया। इस आंदोलन में स्वामी अग्निवेश के निकट सहयोगी कैलाश सत्याश्री पर नाथद्वारा मंदिर के पंडे पुजारियों द्वारा कालिलाना हमला किया, इस हमले में कैलाश सत्याश्री की जिंदगी किसी तरह से बच गई। क्रांतिकारी तकरारों के लिए प्रख्यात रहे स्वामी अग्निवेश के सांप्रदायिकता विरोधी विचारों और व्याख्यानों में निहित समाजवादी प्रखरता से कटुपराधी हिंदू सलान प्रायः उनसे नाराज ही बने रहे। अग्निवेश के जीवनकाल में अनेक दफा उन पर कालिलाना हमले किए गए। दो वर्ष पूर्व रांची में एक कटुपराधियों के गुट द्वारा अग्निवेश पर एक कालिलाना हमला किया गया, जबकि वह आदिवासी किसानों की एक मीटिंग को संबोधित करने जा रहे थे। यह हमला वस्तुतः कटुपराधियों द्वारा मांब लॉचिंग के अंदाज में अंजाम दिया गया। इस कालिलाना हमले में स्वामी अग्निवेश के तीव्र में एक गंभीर घाव हो गया था। इसी जख्म के परिणामस्वरूप लंबी तीमारादारी के बावजूद उनके जीवन को बचाया नहीं जा सका। निजी बातचीत में अग्निवेश प्रायः कहा करते थे कि सांप्रदायिक कटुपराधी गणेश शंकर विद्याधी और हमला ग्राही की तरह उनकी हत्या तो कर सकते हैं, किंतु जीते जी उनको सांप्रदायिकता के किर्द्ध संग्राम करने से कदापि खौफजदा नहीं कर सकते।

भले ही स्वामी अग्निवेश ने इस नश्वर संसार को अलविदा कह दिया है, किंतु उनका प्रखर समाजवादी नजरिया, उनकी असीम वीरता, मेहनतकश किसान मजदूरों के प्रति उनका गहन अनुराग, धार्मिक, सांस्कृतिक और सामाजिक एकाता के लिए उनके अथक प्रयास भारत के जनमानस को एक समाजवादी भारत का सृजन करने के लिए प्रेरित करते रहेंगे।



अपना प्रारंभिक कार्यक्षेत्र बनाया गया। हरियाणा के किसान आंदोलनों में नेतृत्वकारी शिरकात करने के कारण अग्निवेश को अनेक दफा जेल यात्राएं करनी पड़ीं। जेपी आंदोलन में सक्रिय भागीदारी के कारण आपातकाल में हुकूमत द्वारा वारंट निकाला गए। नौ महीनों फरारी के पश्चात अग्निवेश को गिरफ्तार कर लिया गया और आपात काल के शेष दस महीने जेल में बिताए। जेपी आंदोलन में सक्रिय शिरकात करने से हासिल हुई शोहरत ने 1977 में अग्निवेश को विधायक और फिर हरियाणा का शिक्षामंत्री बना दिया। 1978 में जनता पार्टी के अध्यक्ष चंद्रशेखर द्वारा अग्निवेश को जनता पार्टी का महासचिव नियुक्त कर दिया गया। 1980 में हरियाणा की पत्थर खदानों मजदूरों के आंदोलन पर पुलिस फायरिंग के विरोध में अग्निवेश ने मंत्रांपद से त्यागपत्र देकर बंधुआ मजदूरों की मुक्ति के लिए राष्ट्रव्यापी अभियान संचालित करने का आगाज किया और बंधुआ मुक्ति मोर्चा की बुनियाद रखी।

बंधुआ मुक्ति मोर्चा के तहत संचालित देशव्यापी अभियान ने अग्निवेश को विश्वव्यापी ख्याति और सम्मान प्रदान किया। संयुक्त राष्ट्र महासभा द्वारा अग्निवेश को एंटी स्लेवरी कमीशन का चेयरमैन नियुक्त किया गया। विश्वघटल पर नोबेल प्राइज के समकक्ष करार दिए जाने वाले लिबरी हुई प्राइज ने स्वामी अग्निवेश को सम्मानित किया गया। उल्लेखनीय है कि अग्निवेश के अतिरिक्त केवल दो भारतीयों क्रमशः मेधा पटेल और असगर अली इंडीनियर को लिबरी हुई प्राइज से

{ SWAMI AGNIVESH } 1939-2020

Seer who waged social battles dies

Agencies

letters@hindustantimes.com

NEW DELHI: Social activist Swami Agnivesh, who was suffering from liver cirrhosis for a long time, died of multi-organ failure at a Delhi hospital on Friday, doctors said. He was 80.

His last rites will be performed on Saturday at Agni Lok Ashram in Gurugram at 4pm. Before that, his body will be kept at his office on 7, Jantar Mantra Road so that people can pay last respects.

Agnivesh was critically ill and admitted to an ICU of the Institute of Liver and Biliary Sciences, and was on ventilator support since Tuesday, the doctors said. "He was suffering from liver cirrhosis and died today due to multi-organ failure as his condition deteriorated and he went into cardiac



PIPHOTO

arrest at 6pm," a spokesperson of the hospital said. Resuscitation was attempted but he passed away at 6.30pm, he said.

Union minister Hardeep Singh Puri, West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee and Congress leader Rahul Gandhi were among those who condoned his demise. "Deeply saddened to hear about the

demise of social activist & champion of women's rights Swami Agnivesh Ji. My condolences to his admirers & followers. RIP," Puri tweeted.

"Grieved at the passing of Swami Agnivesh, who gave up a career as a professor in Kolkata to fight for many causes," Banerjee posted on Twitter.

Gandhi called his demise an "irreparable loss" to the country. "His demise is an irreparable loss to the entire country and Arya Samaj. My humble tribute to him," he tweeted.

Born as Vega Shyam Rao on September 21, 1939 at Srikalum, Andhra Pradesh, Agnivesh founded Arya Sabha, a political party based on Arya Samaj principles, in 1970.

Agnivesh became a member of the legislative assembly of Haryana in 1977 and in 1981 founded the Bonded Labour Liberation Front to raise the issues surrounding bonded

labour in India.

He was a prominent face of 2011 anti-corruption protests but later broke away from the main group of protesters.

According to his website, he has participated in numerous initiatives to foster peace and interfaith harmony in Kashmir during periods of violence. In 2010, he was appointed by the government of India as the mediator to foster dialogue between the government and the Maoist leadership.

On a few occasions, Agnivesh earned the ire of Hindu groups by his controversial statements, including one made in 2007 when he said Puri's Jagannath Temple should allow entry of non-Hindus.

In 2018, he was attacked by a mob in Jharkhand's Pakur district where he had gone to attend an event organised by a tribal group.

Swami Agnivesh: Voice of the voiceless

DR VENKAT PILLAI AND BHARATH BHUSAN MAMIDI

Swami Agnivesh was born in an orthodox Telugu family in Srikalum. He lost his father when he was four and was brought up by his maternal uncle. Agnivesh was a very curious child with many questions to ask. Why has this god got three heads not one? And how does he not use the pillow when he goes to bed? "How does another God look like a lion and yet another looks like a monkey? In what language do they talk to each other? A volley of questions. But of course, he was afraid of ghosts and would go to bed only after reciting Hanuman Chalisa, in praise of Lord Hanuman the same monkey God.

His innocence stretches further that he would recite it five times on behalf of his sisters and brother in the joint family. When farm labour came home, he was told to give them food from distance. He was told that they were untouchables. As he had no father when he came from school he would crawl into mother's lap, but soon was told that he couldn't run to her three days in a month! He asked them is mum an untouchable too?

He was told that she is untouchable for three days. Agnivesh was not just curious he was critical too for he soon learnt that in matters of religion no questioning was required as elders wouldn't provide answers immediately.

When he was 17, he began paying for his education in Calcutta and later joined the Arya Samaj that opposes ritual and dogma and requires of everything that it be questioned. Soon he learnt that there are three Ds in the pathway to development: 'to doubt', to debate and if necessary, to dissent'. This became Agnivesh's mantra that he took to his teaching of Law at St Xavier's College Calcutta and later into practice at the Calcutta High Court.

There was once incident Swami Agnivesh narrated to around 130 scholars from more than 30 countries in 2014. It was about James Wolfensohn's first ever visit to India as the President of World Bank. Swamiji was holding a placard on the other side of the street Swamiji recalled that interestingly, this man, Wolfensohn, instead of get-



Swami Agnivesh having five-rupee lunch sitting on the floor along with the urban poor in Hyderabad during his visit to the city in 2014

ting annoyed, irritated, he invited us inside his office, something that our own state and central ministers would never do that.

A few days later Swamiji was invited to present his views in Washington DC, where he unfolded his concept of globalization which he explained to them as Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, the whole humanity is a family with sharing, and caring—a paradigm that a commodifying world of market forces and globalisation is

try to kill and take away and plunder.

After giving us a fine lecture about the power of love Swamiji went out for five-rupee lunch sitting on the floor along with the urban poor in Hyderabad, consistent and natural of his beliefs. A man that was jailed eleven times for he spoke the truth and that truth he spoke was powerful, the truth he gained from his walking by the side of the people, people and in their fights for their dignity, their freedom from hunger and from their slavery.

Fifty years is a long time in a man's life. Every people's movement which a debate and dissent was required Swamiji was there. He was the voice of the voiceless and the friend to both sides in highly conflicting situations. There could never be a better interlocutor between the state and the Naxalites.

His values and principles earned the respect and admiration of several groups, state and non-state actors when it's a challenge of restoring peace. Often, he was the best choice of both parties in a conflicting situation to restore the space for dialogue to overcome

the deadlock.

He symbolised the hope and resolution rooted in universal principles of humanism where there is no conflict between spirituality without religious dogma and traditional values are harmony with modern social systems of equity and justice. Swamiji is the example of the Indian model of humanism that is above contradictions of the wrong application of the principles of development based on aggrandisement and inequalities

Swamiji represented a true model of an Indian never being subjected to regional prejudices. It is difficult to find someone else who walked and practiced democracy as it ought to be. He also served for a while as a legislator and Minister in Haryana and a social activist fighting for the liberation of bonded labour. His emphasis on the importance of preserving the right to question authority that may emanate from political patriarchal religions or social will be greatly remembered. The demise of Swamiji now is a great loss to all those discerning and thinking hearts in the country.

Activist-scholar Swami Agnivesh passes away

He was an advocate for dialogue between religions, fought against bonded labour

BINDU SHAN PERAPPADAN
NEW DELHI

Social activist, scholar, politician and Arya Samaj leader Swami Agnivesh passed away at the Institute of Liver and Biliary Sciences (ILBS) here on Friday.

He was hospitalised for treatment of liver cirrhosis earlier this week. His condition became critical after he suffered multi-organ failure during the treatment, hospital authorities said.

Agnivesh was on ventilator and being monitored by a multi-disciplinary team.

The 80-year-old leader went into cardiac arrest at 6 p.m. Resuscitation was attempted, but he passed away at 6.30 p.m., the hospital authorities said in a statement on Friday evening.



Swami Agnivesh

The former MLA from Haryana is known for his work against bonded labour through the Bonded Labour Liberation Front, which he founded in 1981.

Agnivesh became president (2004-2014) of the World Council of Arya Samaj, the highest international body of the Arya Samaj. He was an advocate for dialogue between religions and remained

involved in various areas of social activism, including campaigns against female foeticide and for the emancipation of women.

He served as the chairperson of the United Nations Voluntary Trust Fund on Contemporary Forms of Slavery from 1994 to 2004.

He was a prominent associate of Anna Hazare during the India Against Corruption campaign in 2011 to implement the Jan Lokpal Bill.

Born in Andhra Pradesh, Agnivesh founded Arya Sabha, a political party based on Arya Samaj principles, in 1970. He was elected to the Haryana Assembly in 1977 and made Education Minister after two years.

He, however, resigned in protest against the Haryana

government's inaction against policemen who opened fire at workers protesting against bonded labour.

In July 2018, Agnivesh was assaulted, allegedly by BJP Yuva Morcha workers, in Jharhand's Pakur, where he was supporting tribal communities' protest against land acquisition by the State.

'An irreparable loss'

Condolence messages poured in for the departed leader. Congress leader Rahul Gandhi tweeted: "Swami Agnivesh ji, the founder of Bandhu Mukti Morcha and revolutionary leader of Arya Samaj, passed away today. Swami ji's death is an irreparable loss to the entire country including Arya Samaj. My humble tribute."

సామెలను విశ్వాసు రగిలించిన 'అగ్నిశిఖ'



అగ్నిశిఖ

జీవితాంతరం భారతీయ సామెలను విశ్వాసు రగిలించిన అగ్నిశిఖ స్వామి అగ్నిశిఖ మరణించారు. ఆయన 80 ఏళ్ల వయస్సులో మరణించారు. ఆయన భారతీయ సామెలను విశ్వాసు రగిలించిన అగ్నిశిఖ స్వామి అగ్నిశిఖ మరణించారు. ఆయన 80 ఏళ్ల వయస్సులో మరణించారు.

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रोहताक की धरती पर संघर्ष का पहला सबक लेकर जिंदगी भर जूझते रहे स्वामी अग्निवेश

हरिभूमि न्यूज. रोहताक ११ ०८ २०२०

- By Chetan Verma



विख्यात आर्यसमाजी स्वामी अग्निवेश की कई भाषाओं पर अच्छी पकड़ थी। साल भर में ही रोहताक ही नहीं बल्कि पूरे हरियाणा में जाना पहचाना चेहरा हो गए और फिर जल्द ही एक समय ऐसा आया कि वो विधायक ही नहीं बने बल्कि हरियाणा की सरकार में शिक्षामंत्री भी बन गए ।

१९६८ में एक २७ साल का युवा कपड़े के धैले में कुछ जरूरत के कपड़े लेकर रोहताक पहुंचा। आर्य समाज "Arya Samaj" की विचारधारा से प्रभावित होकर दयानंद मठ की संस्कृति को अपना लिया। दिन के अधिकतर समय आर्य समाज का प्रचार प्रसार और लोगों के बीच बैठकर जन समस्याओं को जानने की कांशिश में वो देखते ही देखते हिंदी के साथ-साथ हरियाणवी भी अच्छी खासी बोलने लगे। वैसे, उनकी कई भाषाओं पर अच्छी पकड़ थी।

साल भर में ही रोहताक ही नहीं बल्कि पूरे हरियाणा Haryana में जाना पहचाना चेहरा हो गए और फिर जल्द ही एक समय ऐसा आया कि वो विधायक ही नहीं बने बल्कि हरियाणा की सरकार में शिक्षामंत्री भी बन गए। बात हो रही है विख्यात आर्यसमाजी स्वामी अग्निवेश की। आज वो नहीं रहे हैं लेकिन रोहताक सहित हरियाणा का एक भी कोना ऐसा नहीं है जहां से वो परिचित नहीं रहे हों। अक्सर रोहताक से कोई उन्हें मिलने जाता तो वो हरियाणवी में जरूर पूछते- और सुणाओ कै हाल है। उनके एक साक्षात्कार के महत्वपूर्ण अंश यहां प्रस्तुत हैं, जिसमें उन्होंने हरियाणा के अपने अनुभवों पर खुलकर चर्चा की थी।

रोहताक के बारे में: रोहताक मुझे बेहद पसंद आया था। यहां के लोग बेहद सीधे थे लेकिन गजब के मेहनती थे। सीधी बात कहते थे चाहे सामने वाले को बुरी लगे

या भली। कलकत्ता के सेंट जेवियर्स कलेज में एक शिक्षक के रूप में पाँच साल तक नौकरी करने के बाजूबूट्ट ऐसा कुछ था जो खालीपन का अहसास करवाता था। यह कलकत्ता और बंगाल में एक अशांत समय था, क्योंकि वहां चरमपंथी नक्सली आंदोलन जोर पकड़ रहा था।

वहां असमानता और अन्याय के खिलाफ लड़ने का एक गहरा आग्रह महसूस किया। उस समय के मुझे अन्य विषयों के बीच भूमि अधिकार थे। नक्सली आंदोलन का अपना सिद्धांत था कि क्रांति बंदूक की बैरल से बढ़ती है लेकिन मैंने उसे अस्वीकार्य पाया। इसी दौरान अनुभव किया कि एक विकल्प केवल महत्वपूर्ण और चुनौतीपूर्ण हो सकता है: एक अहिंसक क्रांति के लिए जनता को जुटाना।

आर्य समाज आंदोलन ने जनता और गरीब किसानों और किसानों को प्रेरित करने के लिए वेदों के वैचारिक समूह का उपयोग किया था। हरियाणा में जाने का मेरा इसी सोच को आगे बढ़ाने का था और आर्य समाज ने मेरी जिंदगी को बदल दिया। रोहताक के दयानंद मठ की संस्कृति में रचने बसने के बाद जब लोगों से मुलाकात की तो यह तय हो गया कि हरियाणा में कोई भी सफलता राष्ट्रीय राजनीति को भी प्रभावित कर सकती है।

जन्म और शिक्षा दीक्षा: जन्म एक रूढ़िवादी, ब्राह्मण परिवार में हुआ था। मातृभाषा तेलुगु थी। आंध्र प्रदेश के श्रीकाकुलम बेरहामपुर में गांव था और ये उड़ीसा की सीमा पर स्थित है। चार साल की उम्र में अपने पिता को खो दिया था और उनकी मां अग्निवेश और मेरे चार भाइयों और बहनों के साथ अपने नाना के साथ रहने चली गईं, जो कि मध्य प्रदेश, जो अब छत्तीसगढ़ में एक रियासत के मुख्यमंत्री थे, के साथ रहने लगे। इसलिए मुझे उनके मार्गदर्शन और अधिकार के तहत लाया गया। वह एक भक्त ईसान थे, जो सभी देवी-देवताओं की पूजा करते थे। मुझे उनके बारे में पढ़ाया गया था और हालांकि, मेरे पास बहुत सारे सवाल थे, लेकिन मुझे उनसे पूछने की अनुमति नहीं थी। परिणामस्वरूप बालकपन में उन्होंने महसूस किया कि वो एक धार्मिक पैकेज के हिस्से के रूप में अंधविश्वास, दृढधर्माता और अनुष्ठानों का अभ्यास कर रहे थे।

कलकत्ता से रोहताक: १७ वर्ष की आयु में मेट्रिक के बाद कलकत्ता के लिए कलकत्ता चला गया। वहां आर्य समाज आंदोलन से परिचय हुआ और इसने नींव से हिला दिया, स्वामी अग्निवेश को नई सोच मिली। आर्य समाज में पाखंड के बारे में, जाति व्यवस्था के बारे में

और धर्मीनपेक्ष धर्म के कई आयामों के बारे में और अधिक सवाल पूछने के लिए हर कदम पर प्रोत्साहित किया गया। दृष्टिकोण बहुत तर्कसंगत और बहुत प्रतिशील, बहुत समतावादी था, कुल मिलाकर एक बहुत ही आध्यात्मिक विचारधारा, जिसे गले लगाया। एक नए रूपांतर की तरह, मैं प्रचार करने की इच्छाशक्ति के साथ काफी उत्साही बन गया, जैसा कि मैंने इसे एक अच्छी विचारधारा के रूप में देखा, और दुनिया को क्या चाहिए।

रोहतक का दयानंद मठ: मैं नौसिखिए ब्रह्मचारी के रूप में नौसिखिए में रोहतक के दयानंद मठ में आर्य समाज आंदोलन में शामिल हो गया। पहले कदम के रूप में, मैंने अपने कपड़े, सूट छोड़ दिए और गेरुआ वस्त्र पहन लिए। मैंने खुद को आर्य समाज परंपरा में एक ब्रह्मचारी के रूप में पुष्टि की। मैंने और मेरे सहयोगियों ने दो साल की अवधि के लिए एक साथ सब कुछ किया, अध्ययन किया, नंगे पैर ही लंबी दूरी तक चलना, फर्श पर सोना, बिना नमक का खाना, नंगे न्यूनतम कपड़े के साथ रहना। मैं पहले खुद को परखना चाहता था, यह देखने के लिए कि क्या मैं अनुशासन और संघर्ष की कठोरता को खड़ा कर सकता हूँ।

हरियाणा में और क्या किया: हमने एक यात्रा शुरू की। प्रत्येक गाँव में जब हम हरियाणा से चले तो हमें गाणधने देने के लिए बुलाया गया, क्योंकि लोग हमारे सुनना चाहते थे। हमने उनसे अपनी समस्याओं के बारे में बात की और प्रतिक्रिया जबरदस्त होती। यह बहुत उत्साहजनक था। जो कहा गया उसमें वास्तव में कुछ भी नया नहीं था। वे सिर्फ हमें अपनी स्थिति के बारे में बताना चाहते थे, और हम इस बात पर चर्चा करेंगे कि हालात ऐसे क्यों थे।

हमने वहाँ से दिल्ली में लाल किले की प्राचीर से १८ दिनों तक मार्च किया, हमेशा हरियाणा के ग्रामीण इलाकों

में नंगे पांव घूमते हुए। हमारा उद्देश्य ग्रामीण जनता के साथ बातचीत करना और समझना था। हम उन्हें करीब से जानना चाहते थे और उनके मन में आशा जगाना चाहते थे कि बदलाव संभव है। शुरुआत में हमारे पास कुछ मोटे विचार थे, लेकिन वे इतने गहरे नहीं थे। जब हम एक जगह से दूसरी जगह गए, तो ग्रामीण लोग अपनी गरीबी और अज्ञानता के साथ, बहुत संवेदनशील थे।

उन्होंने हमारा स्वागत किया, कम समय के लिए २०० के लिए भोजन तैयार किया, और हमें सर्वश्रेष्ठ आतिथ्य प्रदान किया, भले ही हम अज्ञात युवा लोग थे। प्रत्येक दिन हम अपने रात के शिविर के लिए एक नए गांव में चले गए। यह कारवां आगे बढ़ा और जब हम पहुंचे तो हर कोई तैयार था, और लोग हमारा स्वागत करते हुए, हमारा स्वागत करते हुए इकट्ठा हो रहे थे। हम इससे रोमांचित थे, क्योंकि हमने इस प्रतिक्रिया, इस उत्तर-वृद्धि की तरह कुछ भी नहीं देखा था। लोगों ने आशा के संदेश के साथ शिक्षित युवकों के इस समूह में आशा को देखा।

ग्रामीण महिलाओं ने विशेष रूप से हमें दिखाया कि कैसे उन्होंने विकास की समस्याओं को समझा। संभवतः प्रत्येक गांव में महिलाएं हमें बता रही थी कि सरकार द्वारा स्थापित की गई शराब की दुकान घरेलू हिंसा का सबसे बड़ा स्रोत थी और गांव के वातावरण और पारिवारिक शांति को विषाक्त कर दिया। ये शराब की दुकानें छोटी-छोटी इमारतें थीं, जैसे प्रत्येक गाँव के बाहरी हिस्से में एक झोपड़ी, लेकिन उन्होंने इसे सभी परेशानियों के स्रोत के रूप में देखा। यह ऐसा था जैसे शराब की दुकान आने से पहले सब कुछ ठीक और शांतिपूर्ण था। उन्होंने इसे बुराई के स्रोत के रूप में इंगित





किया। जैसा कि हमने मार्च किया, यह एक सामान्य मुद्दा बनकर उभरा, और शराब विरोधी आंदोलन के चारों ओर सह-संबंध था।

आपातकाल और इसके बाद राजनीति: आपातकाल में जेल में बंद रहा और वहां गांधी जी के साहित्य का अध्ययन किया। फिर चीजें बदल गईं। १९७७ से १९८२ तक हरियाणा राज्य की विधान सभा का सदस्य था और मैंने शिक्षा मंत्री के रूप में संक्षिप्त सेवा की। तब भी हम हर दिन खुद का विरोध ही कर रहे थे और मैंने खुद को सिस्टम से ज्यादा परेशान पाया। राजनीतिक प्रक्रिया दर्दनाक थी। राजनेताओं का एक पूरा वर्ग था जो एक ही पाटी, जनता पाटी, और नारायण के आंदोलन के कुल क्रांति के थे। जितनी जल्दी वे नारायण को त्यागते थे, उतनी जल्दी वे राजनेता अपनी सीटों पर नहीं होते थे और उनकी मृत्यु के बाद उन्हें छोड़ दिया जाता था। जेपी नारायण, एक महान करुणा के आदमी, गांधी की तरह एक बहुत ही दुःखद मौत मर गए।

सत्ता में आपका समय कैसा था? हरियाणा में शिक्षा गंभी के रूप में गैरा कार्यकाल बहुत संक्षिप्त था और जिस दिन मैंने अपनी सरकार के खिलाफ विरोध किया, मुझे इस्तीफा देने के लिए मजबूर होना पड़ा। हमारी सरकार को नागरिक स्वतंत्रता बहाल करने के विशिष्ट जनादेश के साथ सत्ता में रखा गया था जो श्रीमती गांधी के अधीन ले लिया गया था।

हमें नागरिक अधिकारों को बहाल करने के लिए सत्ता में लाया गया था लेकिन हरियाणा के मुख्यमंत्री दिल्ली की सीमा के पास एक औद्योगिक टाउनशिप फरीदाबाद के उद्योगपतियों को खुश करने के लिए अपने रास्ते से हट गए। उन्होंने पूरे साल के लिए शहर में ६ गारा १४४ लागू कर दी। यह एक ऐसा कानून था जो अंग्रेजों ने पारित किया था और मुख्य रूप से इस्तेमाल किया था जब वे एक भीड़ को तितर-बितर करना चाहते थे, और यह प्रदान किया कि पांच से अधिक लोग इकट्ठा न हो सकें।

उन्होंने एक-दो दिन में इसका उपयोग किया था। कानून अभी भी कितनी पर था। लेकिन हमारे अपने सज्जनों ने इसे पूरे एक साल के लिए लगाया था,

इसलिए कामकाजी लोग कभी भी गेट मीटिंग नहीं कर पाएंगे, मार्गें नहीं उठाएंगे या जो भी होगा। जब अंत में, मेरे अनुनय पर, श्रमिक नेताओं ने एक जुलूस निकाला, तो पुलिस ने उनका सामना किया। उन पर गोलीबारी की गई और १२ कारखाने के श्रमिकों को गोली मार दी।

मैंने कैबिनेट मीटिंग में विरोध किया और मुझे चुप रहने के लिए कहा गया, क्योंकि वह मेरा पोर्टफोलियो नहीं था। लेकिन गृह मंत्री ने न्यायिक जांच का आदेश देने के बजाय, एक मजिस्ट्रेटल जांच का आदेश दिया, जो वास्तव में उन्हीं लोगों द्वारा किया जाएगा, जिन्होंने गोलीबारी का आदेश दिया था। मैं एक चश्मदीद था। चंडीगढ़, हरियाणा की राजधानी से, मैं दिल्ली गया, एक प्रेस कन्फ्रेंस बुलाई और अपनी ही सरकार के खिलाफ न्यायिक जांच का आह्वान किया। यह अनसुना था और मेरी पार्टी में हर कोई बहुत परेशान था।

लेकिन मुझे पता था कि मैं सही काम कर रहा था और अपने विवेक का पालन कर रहा था। हालांकि, यह स्पष्ट था कि मैं मंत्री के रूप में नहीं रह सकता और इस्तीफा देना पड़ा। फिर, उन्होंने मेरा त्याग पत्र प्राप्त किया और घबरा गए और मुझसे एक-लाइन में बयान जारी करने के लिए कहा गया, जिसमें बस यह कहना जाना था कि मेरे जिम्मेदार बयान सही नहीं थे। यह एक सामान्य तरीका था कि राजनेता चीजों से दूर हो जाए। लेकिन मैंने कहा कि मेरा हर शब्द सही था और इसलिए, मेरे पास इस्तीफा देने के अलावा कोई विकल्प नहीं था। तीन महीने और आठ दिनों के भीतर मैंने अपना मंत्री पद छोड़ दिया।

मैंने गांधी के महान और आकर्षक विचार के साथ पूर्ण भाग में जाने का फैसला किया जिसने मुझे अपनी जेल अवधि के दौरान प्रेरित किया था। मुझे विश्वास था कि अंतिम में से सबसे कम लोगों के बीच दिल था कि विकास किस बारे में था। इसे विकास का आधार बनाना चाहिए। इसका मतलब है कि विकास नीचे से ऊपर की ओर शुरू होना चाहिए, नीचे से नहीं। इसलिए तब से मैं बंधुआ मजदूरी के मुद्दे पर, दिल्ली और उसके आसपास आधुनिक समय की गुलामी के शिकार लोगों के लिए संगठित हो गया।



PRESS RELEASE 21st September 2020

On the 21st of September 2020, Bandhwa Mukti Morcha and the World Council of Arya Samaj organized a tribute meeting in the memory of Swami Agnivesh. The event was held at Gurukul Gautam Nagar, New Delhi, and marked Swamiji's birth anniversary, as well as the International Peace Day.

Swami Agnivesh was a revolutionary leader, saint and social activist, who spent his entire life working for the rights of vulnerable communities, especially bonded labourers. His demise has been mourned by lakhs of people across the globe in general and India in particular, with several political leaders, social activists and spiritual leaders expressing their grief at his passing away. Due to the circumstances caused by the spread of COVID 19, many distinguished people could not be physically present for the tribute meeting, and sent across letters and video messages to pay their tribute.

Former Prime Minister of India, Dr. Manmohan Singh, marked Swami ji's immense contribution in fostering inter-religious harmony in the country. Dr. Singh also marked his pivotal role in advocating for the rights of labourers by stating "In his death, our country has lost a crusader of the liberation of bonded labourers." Resonating this, M. Venkaiah Naidu, Vice President of India, noted Swami Agnivesh's efforts to not only work for the emancipation of women and victims of forced labour, but also create awareness about these societal evils through various campaigns. In her tribute to Swami ji, Sonia Gandhi, Chairperson of Congress Parliamentary Party, noted "All his life he fought with great courage and conviction for the most marginalized sections of our society, fearless in defending their rights and in facing up to those who exploited and oppressed them and terrorized the poor, often at great personal risk. He was a most powerful and effective voice for the vulnerable and the defenseless." Member of Parliament Rahul Gandhi also noted the great loss that the demise of the revolutionary Arya Samaj leader and founder of Bandhwa Mukti Morcha had brought upon the country through a tweet.

Several Chief Ministers also expressed their grief at the demise of the great leader. Chief Minister of Bihar, Nitesh Kumar, appreciated the strength and openness with which Swami Agnivesh talked about societal problems, and highlighted the important work that he had carried out against female foeticide and emancipation of women. "The country has lost a remarkable social and political figure with his demise" he remarked. Ashok Gehlot, Chief Minister of Rajasthan, extended his strength to Swami Agnivesh's supporters, and noted the great work Swami ji

had done to uphold human rights. While offering his condolences, Pinarayi Vijayan, Chief Minister of Kerala, noted how Swami ji was led by his conscience throughout his life, and had remained a relentless voice for the oppressed and unheard. Chief Minister of Punjab, Captain Amarinder Singh and Chief Minister of Telangana, Chandrababhan Naidu, also expressed their heartfelt grief at the demise of the revolutionary social activist, and paid their salute to him. Banbaru Dattatreya, Governor of Himachal Pradesh also paid his tributes.

Swami Agnivesh's contributions had not limited themselves to the physical boundaries of the nation-state, and his demise was mourned beyond India as well. Former Prime Minister of Nepal, Dr. Baburam Bhattarai, expressed his condolences through a video message, and fondly remembered the support that Swami ji had extended to him at various stages of his life. Calling Swami Agnivesh "a great friend of Nepal and the Nepalese people", he mentioned the spontaneous public pouring of grief in Nepal at his sad demise. Even the United Nations Resident Coordinator of Bhutan, Gerald Daly, cherished the professional and personal time he spent with Swami Agnivesh while working for the Bhutan Dialogue and Food Insecurity Atlas of India, and remarked the strength with which Swami ji was never afraid to ask tough questions for the sake of creating a system of sustainability. The Tibetan Parliament-in-Exile also offered their deep condolence, and noted his active participation in the multiple campaigns that were held for the Tibetan cause in Delhi. President of World Constitution and Parliament Association Dr. Glen T. Martin, and Oliver Mendelsohn of La Trobe University in Melbourne also paid their tribute to Swami Agnivesh.

Swami Agnivesh had played a critical role in fostering interfaith dialogue in the country. "I met Swami ji in 2003, and after listening to his thoughts, I became his" wrote Maulana A.R. Shaheen Qasmi, General Secretary of World Peace Organization, Delhi, while expressing his grief. "Swami Agnivesh ji, as his name itself represents is a fierce fighter, and he fought with a smile", noted spiritual leader and founder of Art of Living Foundation, Sri Sri Ravi Shankar ji, while reminiscing his long association with Swami ji, that had continued since 1980. He spoke extensively about Swami ji's belief in 'sarva dharma sambhav' and his advocacy of non-violence through the study of vedas. "We have lost a great activist who fought for the rights of the bonded labourers, and for freedom and justice. May soul live in peace and his

legacy live on” wrote Anil Couto, Archbishop of Delhi. Dr. Mohd. Ali Rabbani, Cultural Counselor and Head of Iran Culture House, New Delhi, and Mohammad Salim Engineer, Vice President of Jammat-e-Islami Hind also offered their deep condolences to his grieving followers. Faisal bin Muammar, Secretary General of KAICIID, reiterated Swami ji’s commitment to peace and nonviolence, his unwavering dedication to justice and truth, and his long decades of service to the most deprived, most marginalized among us.

Several social activists and scholars also paid their tribute to Swami ji. Noted scholar and historian, Ranchandra Guha, paid his tribute to the “courageous human being” and “heroic (and always non-violent) fighter for the unprivileged”. Henri Tiphagne, Executive Director of People’s Watch, expressed his tribute through a note dedicated to Swami ji. “Thank you for your courage and standing up for those who needed a voice and representation. You will be dearly missed. The fight continues!” President of Adivasi Vikas Parishat, Totaram Bhil, noted the immense work done by Swami Agnivesh for the Bhil community. He wrote “Swami Agnivesh fought for justice for the Dalits and Adivasis, and we will always remember his contributions.” Political activist, scholar and founder of Swaraj India, Yoegendra Yadav, also paid his tributes, and noted the many great tasks that Swami ji had carried out during his lifetime. Harsh Mander admired the strong stance that Swami ji had bravely taken against religious bigotry, politics of hate, and against bonded and child labour, and noted the huge void that he had left behind.

The tribute meeting held at Gurukul, Gautam Nagar, was presided by Swami Aryavesh, President of World Council of Arya Samaj, who emphasized on how Swami Agnivesh had not only followed the path that Swami Dayanand had prescribed, but also understood religion in its most holistic sense. He was a brave and determined individual, who never gave up. The event was conducted by Senior Leader of Bandhna Mukti Morcha, Professor Vithal Rao.

The meeting was attended by Dr. Ved Prakash Vedic, Maya Prakash Tyagi and Swami Pranavanand, among many other followers, who had come to pay their regards to the great leader.

With Regards,

Swami Aryavesh
President
World council of Arya Samaj
Mob. 9899823256

Vithal Rao Arya
Secretary
World council of Arya Samaj
Mob. 9849560691

Dear Swami Aryavesh

I am sorry that because of a domestic health crisis (my mother-in-law's) I have not been able to record a message. But Swami Agnivesh meant a lot to me. So I am sending a brief message below in case you get the chance you can have someone read it out on the occasion.

Sitting far away in Ithaca, New York, when I got the news of Swami Agnivesh's passing I felt deeply sad, in a way a rarely do. Memories flashed through my head of so many meetings- in my home in Washington, at a big inter-religious conference in Cornell and numerous times in Delhi. I remember during my busy days in Delhi when I was Chief Economic Adviser to the Indian Government, I would occasionally go over to his home for an occasional quiet conversation. It is not that I agreed with everything he said. But I admired his honesty, his human compassion and personal sacrifice. Also his message of universal tolerance and the need to reject hatred and discrimination against minorities appealed to me. That is why on hearing about his passing, I wrote on twitter:

"Sad that Swami Agnivesh is no more. A practicing Hindu without a hint of intolerance for other people's religion/atheism/beliefs. I remember his master speech at Cornell. Sadly, he was attacked by right-wing extremists 2 years ago. For his memory, let us shun such acts of hatred."

May his soul rest in peace.

- Kaushik Basu

*Professor of Economics at Cornell University
President of the International Economic Association,
Former Chief Economist of the World Bank
Former Chief Economic Adviser, Government of India.*

Kaushik Basu

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*Uris Hall 404, Cornell UniversityPh: 607 255 4254
Email: uab1@cornell.edu
From: Swami Agnivesh <agnivesh70@gmail.com>
Sent: Friday, September 18" , 2020 2:53 PM
To: Kaushik Basu <kb40@cornell.edu>
Subject: Most urgent Letter Attached.*

स्वामी अग्निवेश जी के जन्म दिवस एवम् विश्व शांति दिवस पर प्रेरणा सभा

आर्य प्रतिनिधि सभा एवं बंधुभा मुक्ति मोर्चा के संयुक्त तत्वावधान में दिनांक २९ सितंबर २०२० को गुरुकुल गौतम नगर के सभा कक्ष में स्वामी अग्निवेश जी के जन्म दिवस एवं विश्व अंतर्राष्ट्रीय विश्व शांति दिवस के उपलक्ष में एक प्रेरणा सभा का आयोजन किया गया। आयोजित प्रेरणा सभा में स्वामी अग्निवेश जी को कई गणमान्य वरिष्ठ महानुभाव ने अपनी श्रद्धांजलि अर्पित करके उन्हें याद किया एवम् समाज कार्य की दिशा में भविष्य की कार्य योजना के संबंध में संकल्प लिया भी लिया।

स्वामी अग्निवेश जी जो कि अंतर्राष्ट्रीय आर्य सन्यासी के रूप में विख्यात थे और उन्होंने अपनी अंतिम सांस तक एक सामाजिक एवं मानवाधिकार कार्यकर्ता के रूप में समाज के अंतिम व्यक्ति के सर्वांगीण विकास, उसके मौलिक अधिकारों तथा समाज में सामाजिक न्याय की स्थापना के लिए संघर्ष करते रहे।

आज आयोजित प्रेरणा सभा में जो गणमान्य महानुभाव दिल्ली नहीं पहुंच पाए उन्होंने अपने विचार विडियो के माध्यम से भेजे जिसे संयालित कार्यक्रम में प्रसारित किया गया।

इस अवसर पर अपने क्रांतिकारी संदेश में भारत के पूर्व प्रधानमंत्री इह मनमोहन सिंह ने स्वामी अग्निवेश जी द्वारा सर्व धर्म समभाव के विषय में जो अभूतपूर्व कार्य किए हैं उनके योगदान पर अपना अपने विचार व्यक्त किए। इह सिंह ने स्वामी अग्निवेश जी के कार्यों के बारे में आगे कहा कि स्वामी जी सिर्फ बंधुभा एवं बाल मजदूरी के मुद्दे तक ही सीमित नहीं रहे बल्कि उन्होंने समाज में नर-नारी विषमता को हटाने के लिए और समाज में जितनी बुराईयां हैं उन सब के खिलाफ अपने कार्यों द्वारा एक क्रांतिकारी अलख जगाई।

इसी तर्ज पर भारत के उपराष्ट्रपति श्री एम वेंकैया नायडू जी ने भी स्वामी जी के द्वारा किए गए अनेक सामाजिक उद्धान के कार्यों को जिसमें जिसमें बंधुभा मजदूरी उन्मूलन एवं नर नारी समानता पर किए गए कार्यों की विशेष चर्चा की।

स्वामी जी को श्रद्धांजलि अर्पित करते हुए श्रीमती सोनिया गांधी जी जो कांग्रेस की पालियामेंट्री कमेटी की चेयरपर्सन हैं उन्होंने कहा कि स्वामी जी पूरे जीवन अत्यंत निर्भीकता के साथ एवं क्रांतिकारी तरीके से जिस प्रकार गरीब से गरीब लोगों के लिए लड़े हैं जिस प्रकार उन्होंने सामाजिक उत्पीड़न और शोषण के खिलाफ आवाज उठाई है वह अद्वितीय है। स्वामी जी हमेशा सबसे गरीब और शोषित व्यक्ति की एक आवाज और उनके लिए एक मसीहा की तरह काम करते रहे। संसद सदस्य एवं कांग्रेस के नेता श्री राहुल गांधी ने अपने ट्वीट में लिखा कि स्वामी अग्निवेश आर्य समाज के एक क्रांतिकारी सन्यासी एवं बंधुभा मुक्ति मोर्चा के अध्यक्ष के रूप में शोषण और

अन्याय के खिलाफ हमेशा लड़ते रहे और उनका इस प्रकार दुनिया से जाना देशभार के लिए खेद की बात है। कई मुख्यमंत्रियों ने अपना खेद एवं श्रद्धांजलि व्यक्त की उनके नाम इस प्रकार है अशोक गहलोत मुख्यमंत्री राजस्थान, पीनारायी विजयन मुख्यमंत्री केरल, अमरिंदर सिंह मुख्यमंत्री पंजाब, चंद्रशेखर राव मुख्यमंत्री तेलंगाना एवं नीतीश कुमार मुख्यमंत्री बिहार। कलार में अपने लिखित विचार प्रस्तुत करने वाले अनेक गणमान्य व्यक्तियों की सूची भी इस प्रकार है बंडारू दत्तात्रेय राज्यपाल हिमाचल प्रदेश डेक्कर बाबूराव भट्टराई, पूर्व प्रधानमंत्री नेपाल, निष्कासित तिब्बती सरकार के प्रधानमंत्री, श्री र्लैंड पी मार्ट इन प्रधान वर्ल्ड कहेनिस्टट्यूशन एंड पार्लिमेंट एसोसिएशन, ओलिवर मंडलसन ला ट्रहब यूनिवर्सिटी मेलबहर्न, मौलाना ए. आर शाहीन कासमी जनरल सेक्रेटरी अहमक वर्ल्ड पीस अहर्गनाइजेशन, आध्यात्मिक गुरु श्री श्री रविशंकर जी, अनिल कोतो आर्चीबिशप, जमीयत ए इस्लामी हिंद के उप प्रधान एवं सेक्रेटरी जनरल तेजल बिन बुधा मार। विभिन्न समाजसेवियों ने भी अपनी श्रद्धांजलि इस अवसर पर लिखित रूप एवं वीडियो के द्वारा प्रस्तुत की जिनमें जाने-माने इतिहासकार रामचंद्र गुहा तोता राम भील प्रधान आदिवासी विकास परिषद, योगेंद्र यादव, हर्ष मंदिर आदि रहे। सभी महानुभावों ने अपने अपने शब्दों में और अपने अपने तरीकों से स्वामी जी के कार्यों कि प्रशंसा की एवं उनके दुनिया से जाने से जो रिक्त स्थान बना है जिसे कभी भरा नहीं जा सकता। कई वक्ताओं ने कहा कि स्वामी जी को सच्ची श्रद्धांजलि तभी होगी जब हम सब लोग मिलकर समाज में व्याप्त अन्याय शोषण एवं कुरीतियों के खिलाफ अपनी आवाज मिलकर बुलंद करेंगे।

श्रद्धांजलि सभा के अध्यक्ष स्वामी आर्यविश्व प्रधान सार्वदेशिक आर्य प्रतिनिधि राणा ने कहा कि रवाणी अग्निवेश की साहसी, मंथवी आर्य सन्यासी के साथ मानवाधिकार के पुरोधा थे। स्वामी जी ने श्रद्धा दयानंद के विचारों को देश विदेशों में पहुंचाया। कार्यक्रम का संचालन बंधुभा मुक्ति मोर्चा के क्रांतिकारी नेता प्रोफेसर विट्ठल राव जी ने किया।

इस अवसर पर माया प्रकाश त्यागी, स्वामी प्रणवानंद, वेद प्रकाश श्रोत्रिय, योगानंद शरात्री, प्रेमपाल शरात्री, गौतम कुमार, मनु सिंह, हवा सिंह, स्वामी विजयवेश, स्वामी संपूर्णानंद, ब्रह्मचारी दिक्षेद्र आर्य, प्रवेश आर्या, पूनम आर्या, बिष्णु पहेल, जियाउद्दीन जावेद, स्वामी वेदतमवेश, विनय आर्य, धर्मेन्द्र आर्य सहित कई साधियों ने अपने विचार व्यक्त किए तथा इस अवसर पर कई सन्यासीगण, सामाजिक कार्यकर्ता, धर्म गुरुओं की उपस्थिति रही।

स्वामी आर्यविश्व

प्रधान

सार्वदेशिक आर्य प्रतिनिधि सभा

श्रद्धांजलि

अल इंडिया क्रिश्चन यूनियन, अलायन्स डिपॉजिट प्रीडम, व दयाल अल्टरनेटिव, बंधुआ मुक्ति मोर्चा , सेंट्रल बोर्ड आफ दार्फदी बोहोरा कम्युनिटी, सेंटर फार स्टडी आफ सोसाइटी एंड सेक्युलरिज्म, क्रिश्चन स्टडी आफ युथ फ्रेंडर डेमोक्रेसी, इंडियन मुस्लिम फार डेमोक्रेसी, कौंसिल फार सोशल जस्टिस ,मुस्लिम वीमेन्स फोरम, नेशनल कान्फेडरेशन आफ ह्यूमन राइट्स, जस्टिस फार पीस- अर्वाइओससे आफ गोआ(दिल्ली फोरम), इको प्रोटेस्ट गोआ, हली पागीपती ट्रस्ट, नार्थ ईस्ट इंडिया रीजनल बिशप्स कौंसिल, सेक्रेटरी फार एक्जुनिइसम, समन्वय तथा स्टूडेंट्स क्रिश्चन मूवमेंट के संयुक्त तत्वावधान में एक वर्चुअल श्रद्धांजलि सभा का आयोजन फादर ए. सी माइकल के संयोजकत्व में किया गया ।

जिसमें सर्वप्रथम आर्चबिशप फेलिक्स (महासांघेय, कैथोलिक बिशप्स कान्फ्रेंस आफ इंडिया) का संदेश पढ़ कर सुनाया गया तत्पश्चात आचार्य गोरवाणी सुशील जी महाराज (सर्वधर्मा संसद), फादर जान दयाल, पद्मश्री डा० सइशा हमीद, बिशप सुबोध मौण्डल (बिशप अहम मेथोडिस्ट चर्च), प्रो० फारुख वारिस, कर्मांडर मंसूर अली बोहरा, राम मोहन राय एवम डा० माइकल विलियम ने स्वामी अग्निवेश जी के साथ अपने संस्मरणों को प्रस्तुत करते हुए उन्हें अपनी श्रधांजलि अर्पित की तथा उन्हें सर्वधर्म समभाव एवम विश्व शांति के प्रति समर्पित न्याक्तिल बताया। इस सभा के लिये आर्चबिशप विनसेंट कान्तेराओ का शोक संदेश भी पढ़ कर सुनाया गया। कंथमाल से विशेष रूप से उनके संस्मरणों को भी याद किया गया। सभा मे निश्चय किया गया कि स्वामी अग्निवेश जी के द्वारा किये गए सर्वधर्म संवाद एवम सम्बन्धों को और अधिक सुदृढ़ किया जाएगा। तथा विश्व शांति तथा मैत्री के लिये कार्यों को बढ़ावा जाएगा।।

श्रद्धांजलि सभा मे देश-विदेश से लगभग सत्तर लोग उपस्थित रहे। सभा के अंत मे सभा संचालक फादर ए. सी माइकल द्वारा सभी का धन्यवाद ज्ञापित किया गया।

हाल के वर्षों में स्वामी अग्निवेश धार्मिक सहिष्णुता और अंतरधार्मिक समरसता की प्रशंसनीय आवाज थे। 'अग्निवेश:जिन्हें बात धुमाकर कहना नहीं आता था'।

(शशि धरूर, सांसद व पूर्व केंद्रीय मंत्री) मैंने स्वामी अग्निवेश को पहली बार तब सुना था, जब मैं जिनेवा में शरणार्थियों के लिए संयुक्त राष्ट्र उच्चायुक्त के कार्यालय में काम कर रहा था। वह वहां पर दासता के समकालीन तरीकों पर बने कार्यदल के समक्ष संयुक्त राष्ट्र मानवाधिकार आयोग में गवाही देने आए थे। अब यह कार्यदल और उच्चयोग अस्तित्व में नहीं है। भगवा कपड़े और पाड़ी पहने अग्निवेश की प्रभावी उपस्थिति और उनके तीव्र भाषण के साथ ही उनकी जलती हुई आंखें बिना प्रेम वाले चश्मे पहने लोगों को बेधौन कर रही थी। जिन्होंने भी जिनेवा में उन्हें एक्शन में सुना वे उन्हें शूल नहीं सके। पिछले सप्ताह शुक्रवार को करीब ८9 साल की उम्र में उनका निधन हुआ। वह कई लोगों के लिए एक रहस्य थे। जन्मा से ब्राह्मण अग्निवेश की परवरीश उनके दादा ने की, जो एक रियासत के दीवान थे। लेकिन, उन्होंने अपनी पहचान सीमांत व दबे कुचले लोगों के साथ बनाई। एक हिंदू साधू जिसने ३० साल में सन्यास ले लिया था, उन्हें आखिर तक हिंदुत्व के कुछ स्तरांग समर्थक निशाना बनते रहे। वह एक राजनेता रहे, विधायक रहे और प्रदेश में कैबिनेट मंत्री भी रहे। पिछले कई दशकों उन्होंने कोई राजनीतिक पद नहीं लिया था। वह एक आर्य समाजी थे, जो उसकी अंतरराष्ट्रीय संस्था के एक दशक तक प्रमुख भी रहे। बाद में खुद की आर्य सभा के गठन के लिए वह उससे अलग हो गए। २००८ में इसकी पिटु संस्था ने उन्हें निष्कासित कर दिया। वह एक ऐसे व्यक्ति थे जो भारतीय मुद्दों और चिंताओं के लिए प्रतिबद्ध थे और

उनकी एक व्यापक अंतरराष्ट्रीय पहचान भी थी। वह १९६४ से २००४ तक दासता के समकालीन प्रकार पर संयुक्त राष्ट्र वारियंटरी ट्रस्ट फंड के अध्यक्ष रहे। वह कुल मिलाकर एक ऐसे भारतीय थे, जो जन्म से आंध्र प्रदेश के थे, छत्तीसगढ़ में बड़े हुए, हरियाणा में विधायक बने जिन्हें पूरा देश जानता था। इस सबसे ऊपर वह एक सामाजिक कार्यकर्ता थे। मंत्री रहते हुए भी बंधुआ मजदूर मुक्ति मोर्चा के माध्यम से बंधुआ मजदूरी के खिलाफ उनके प्रयासों की वजह से काफी सफलता मिली। ८9 साल पहले **वेपा श्याम राव** के रूप में जन्मे स्वामी अग्निवेश तमाम विवादों को समेटे होने के बावजूद भारतीय सार्वजनिक जीवन के सर्वाधिक असाधारण व्यक्तियों में याद किए जाएंगे। यह मेरा सौभाग्य था कि करीब १२ साल पहले राष्ट्रीय राजनीति में प्रवेश के समय से ही नहीं जानता रहा। उन्होंने १९८० के दशक के बाद कभी परंपरागत चुनावी राजनीति नहीं की और वोट की खूब लोकप्रियता के लिए कोई पद हासिल नहीं किया। लेकिन इसके बावजूद वह उस मुद्दे के लिए अथक अभियान चलाते रहे, जिसे वह उचित समझते थे। वह व्यक्ति जिसके पास कानून की डिग्री थी व जिसने कभी उस व्यक्ति के जूनियर के रूप में प्रैक्टिस की थी जो बाद में देश के मुख्य न्यायाधीश बने, उसने अपनी सारी जिंदगी अन्याय पूर्ण कानूनों को चुनौती देने और उन्हें बदलवाने की कोशिश में लगा दी। कुछ मामलों में सफलता भी मिली। जैसे कि बंधुआ मजदूरी निवारण कानून। वह उनके तरीकों से सती प्रथा पर रोक के लिए कानून के भी आध्यात्मिक प्रणेता रहे ।

एक धार्मिक और आध्यात्मिक विचारक स्वामी अग्निवेश ने अपने हिंदुत्व का परिपथ अपने सामाजिक विचारों के साथ कर दिया था और वह इसे वैदिक सनाजवाद कहते थे। बाल दासता से, लेकर कन्या भ्रूण हत्या जैसे मुद्दों के खिलाफ उनके अथक आंदोलन देश भर में चलते रहे। इस प्रक्रिया मे उन पर हुए हमलों में वे बाल-बाल बचे। झारखंड में तो वह भीड़ का शिकार होते-होते बचे थे। आंदोलनों की वजह से वह कई बार जेल भी गये, उन्हें अनेक बार गिरफ्तार किया गया, लेकिन न तो कभी आरोपित किया गया न ही सजा मिली। उन्हें एक बार तो १४ महीनों तक जेल में रहना पड़ा। उन्होंने फरवरी २०११ में माओवादियों द्वारा अपहृत पांच पुलिस वालों को छुड़ाने में भी मदद की थी। हाल के वर्षों में वह धार्मिक सहिष्णुता और अंतरधार्मिक समरसता की प्रशंसनीय आवाज थे। वह अनेक अंतरराष्ट्रीय मंचों पर इस्लाम और मुस्लिम सगुदाय को सफ्राने का आदान कर चुके थे। उन्होंने आतंकवाद पर होने वाले जनसंवाद में भी दखल दिया था। उनका साफ कहना था कि कुछ लोगों के गलत कामों की वजह से पूरे समुदाय को आरोपित करना गलत है। कई कई बार तो वह अपने सिद्धांतों को इतनी चरम भाषा में कहते थे कि मुझ जैसे अनेक उदारवादी भी उनका समर्थन करने में कठिनाई महसूस करते थे। वह कहते थे-“ मैं अपने, यह कहने के लिए कि अमेरिका दुनिया का सबसे बड़ा आतंकवादी है, शब्दों को बदल नहीं सकता। इस्लाम और कुरान को बदनाम करना आतंकवाद का सबसे खराब रूप है।“ अंधविश्वास और फट्टराला के आलोचक रहे अग्निवेश उनके प्रतिवादी चिन्तारों की वजह से कुछ संघटनों के निशाने पर रहे। जैसे कि उनका सुझाव था कि पुरी के जगन्नाथ मंदिर को गैर हिंदुओं के लिए भी खोला जाना चाहिए। इसके बावजूद स्वामी अग्निवेश वह व्यक्ति थे, जिन्होंने अपना जीवन, समय और ऊर्जा अपने सपनों के पीछे लगा दी। मैं उन्हें याद करूंगा। ओम शांति।

(**दैनिक भास्कर दि० १६.०९.२०२० से साभार**)

ECONOMIC TIMES IN THE SPEAKING TREE

- *Swami Agnivesh*

Religions have got universal values that are at the core of those religions. All religions also have, over time, acquired large areas of dogmas, rituals, superstitions, miracle mongering and what not because of the promotion of these aspects by some people who claim to be 'religious'. But these aspects that depart from core philosophies and scientific reasoning are what cloud the true essence of religion. The manner in which religions, religious practices and their custodians have been organised and institutionalised, are far removed from what religions really mean to convey at their very core. Mostly people practise rituals that are mind-boggling and superstitious; the real purpose of religion is lost—which is, to promote love, peace and harmony, among all beings. Religion is meant to make us better human beings, live in harmony with nature and with other beings, and that's how we ought to commune with our Creator. That is why I say that the Sabarimala and Ayodhya issues are far removed from real religion. Ekam sat vipra bahuda vedanti—that which exists is One; sages call it by many names'. If all are One, then Creator, Sustainer, are One. Attributes of nirgun and sagun cannot be associated with the Lord of the Universe who is nirakaar. And nirakaar cannot become saakaar. That would be completely beyond what the Vedas say, Na tasya pratima avasti—No figure or deity can claim to represent the One, any such representation cannot be Supreme, says the Yajur Veda, for the Supreme Divine transcends all forms.

HEART FELT CONDOLENCES FROM JOINT WOMEN'S PROGRAMME !!

I, Dr. Jyotsna Chatterji, team and staff of our community offer our sincere and heartfelt condolences to BMM, Vishwa Arya Samaj and everyone associated with Dear Swami ji for this irreparable loss of a great leader who touched people's heart from every walk of life. Dr. Chatterji's association with Swami ji began as lecturers in Kolkata University and both believed in similar ideologies.

My association with him began during the Nithari child abuse and murder incident and continued till date. Memories of a orange clothed Swamiji who talked of women's empowerment, equal rights and participation in decision making at the highest levels of governance, will always remain with us.

I have been in amazement of his grasp on political and social intricacies and analysis based on human rights. We will miss him.

May he rest in eternal peace !

With Kind Regards

Padmini Kumar

Joint Women's Programme

HEART FELT CONDOLENCES

Date : Saturday, 12th September, 2020

To: <agnivesh70@gmail.com>

It is with deep sorrow and pain that we heard the news (NDTV 11th September, 2020) of passing away of Shree Swami Agniveshji—an Arya Samajist Sannyasi dedicated to the cause of poor and underprivileged to uplift their social standing. We submit our tribute to him. May Almighty God Bless his departed soul with peace.

I was fortunate enough to know him from my early teenage years when he was in limelight along with Shree Swami Indravesh in late sixties—they were initiated into Sannyas-Professor Shyam Rao and Indra Dev Medharthi.. These two branded youth brought the fire storm in the Arya Samaj movement by establishing the Arya Sabha, although this was not their successful adventure or endeavour. Nevertheless, their enthusiasm has inspire others to engage and fight for the social justice which is the fundamental principle of Arya Samaj.

Undoubtedly he was not without controversy, 'he was one of the party of division within the Arya Samaj is one of them. At a Sikh gathering his proposal to amend 14th chapter of Maharshi Dayanand's Light Of Truth-a constitution of Arya Samaj-to suit and please Sikh Panth was his worst unforgivable blunder. But no body should underestimate what he has done more good to Samaj then harm.

In my humble observation in the present political (Unofficial Emergency) situation in India he was the only fearless leader who stood against state terrorising racism and literally fought to the last breath for the right of every creed and cast, for the poor he was the twenty first century Massiha. His kind of souls are not born every day, hundred years down the line when Arya Samaj history will be recorded Swami Agnivesh will be there.

He will be missed dearly.

I salute Swami Agnivesh's great work. His followers must vigorously continue his mission.

We mourn his physical demise and we celebrate his inspiring eternal soul.

Jayatu Sanskritam, Jayatu Sanskriti and long live Arya Samaj.

Always yours,

Dr. Veer Dv Bista (M.A., Ph.D.)

Professor-Eastern Heritage Foundation, U.S.A.

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From: Veer Bista <dr.veerbista@gmail.com>

प्रेस विज्ञप्ति

स्वामी अग्निवेश “हीरो ऑफ ह्यूमैनिटी अवार्ड” जो एक अंतर्राष्ट्रीय ख्याति प्राप्त विज़नर ऑफ ‘टर्नेशनल नेटवर्क से पाने वाले भारतीय बन गए

स्वामी अग्निवेश जो गंभीर स्थिति में हैं, जो वर्तमान स्थिति में, नई दिल्ली के एक अस्पताल - लिवर इंस्टीट्यूट” में जिन्दगी की जंग लड़ रहे हैं, उन्हें विज़नर्स इंटरनेशनल नेटवर्क द्वारा प्रतिष्ठित हीरो अहमक ह्यूमैनिटी अवार्ड से सम्मानित किया गया है। स्वामी अग्निवेश जिन्होंने समाज की कई सारी कुरीतियों के खिलाफ ,विशेषकर पिछले ४ दशकों से अथक प्रयास किया है, कई ऐतिहासिक लड़ाइयां लड़ी है, इस सम्मान को प्राप्त करने वाले पहले भारतीय हैं। इनसे पहले यह सम्मानित अवहर्ड, फ्लोरेस नाइटिंगेल, नीना मुलेरोहोफ, टोनी बुजान, रहबर्ट मुलर आदि जैसे लोगों को दिया जा चुका है।

दो साल पहले झारखंड के पाकुड़ में एक स्तंभवादी दक्षिणपंथी भीड़ द्वारा उन पर हमला किया गया जिससे उन्हें काफी गंभीर चोट आई, और तब से वह काफी गंभीर स्वास्थ्य संबंधी समस्याओं से जूझ रहे थे। हाल में उनकी हालत मार्च से ज्यादा बिगड़ गई और तब से वह अस्पताल में भर्ती है।

जूरी ने उन्हें समाज के हाशिए पर रहने वाले लोगों के लिए उनके प्रयासों को पहचाना और लिखा - “हम आपके ठीक होने के लिए प्रार्थना करते हैं। हम जानते हैं कि आप अपने काम के एक स्वाभाविक विस्तार के रूप में करते हैं, जो आप बिना किसी अपेक्षा के इनम के रूप में करते हैं। और इसके प्राप्तकर्ताओं के लिए परिणाम पर्याप्त रूप से पुरस्कृत होता है। उसी समय, दूसरों को, काम के अपने उदाहरण से प्रेरित, या अपने मंत्रालयों द्वारा चंगा, विचारों को गहन रूप से आंतरिक करें और अपने स्वयं के न्यूफाउंड क्षमता और ऊर्जा द्वारा अपने ज्ञान से परे काम का विस्तार करें। इस तरह, आप मानवता की भलाई के लिए मानवता के भण्डार में जोड़ते हैं। यह मानव संसाधन है कि विज़नर्स परियोजना अपने और दूसरों के उदाहरणों को दिखाते हुए दोहन कर रही है।”

जूरी ने और दोहराया-हम अपने वर्चुअल एक्सपोजे में और हमारे समय के महान कार्यों के विज़न मास्टर मास्टर एम्पौरियम में आपके कार्य का प्रदर्शन और जश्न मनाएंगे, लेकिन यह पुरस्कार प्रमाण पत्र आपके लिए है, यह बताने के लिए कि आप कितने प्रभाव में हैं होने और आपके काम की कितनी सराहना की जाती है। इसे अपने घर में सम्मान के स्थान पर रखें, ताकि आप हर दिन देख सकें कि आप, आपके काम, और आपके जीवन में जो भावनाएँ हैं, वे आपके साथियों, दोस्तों और सहकर्मियों द्वारा मूल्यवान हैं। यह एक गुप्त मुस्कान को उकेरने और आपको जारी रखने के लिए प्रोत्साहित करने के लिए है।

मानवता के लिए आपकी सेवा के लिए धन्यवाद। हम आपके मानवता के नायक के रूप में विज़नर्स लाइफटाइम अचीवमेंट पुरस्कार प्रदान करते हैं **Contact : ९८९८९८९८९३२५६**

**सर्वधर्म श्रद्धांजलि सभा:
गरीबों की आवाज को स्वामी
अग्निवेश ने**

**स्वामी अग्निवेश को
वैचारिक क्रांति का अग्रदूत बताया**

सावदेशिक आर्य प्रतिनिधि सभा की ओर से स्वामी अग्निवेश की स्मृति में मंगलवार को आर्य समाज मंडीर में सर्वधर्म श्रद्धांजलि सभा हुई। इस मौके पर कैथोलिक चर्च के फादर जैकब थहमस ने कहा कि स्वामी अग्निवेश ने गरीबों की आवाज यूएनओ तक पहुंचाई।

सोजती गेट गुरुद्वारा के जयपाल झानी, रंजीतसिंह झानी ने भजन सुनाकर अग्निवेश को श्रद्धांजलि दी। सावदेशिक आर्य प्रतिनिधि सभा नई दिल्ली के उपमंत्री रामसिंह आर्य ने कहा कि हरिजनों को नाथद्वारा मंदिर में प्रवेश दिलाने, सती प्रथा व कन्या भ्रूण हत्या जैसे जघन्य अपराधों के खिलाफ अग्निवेश ने आंदोलन चलाया था।

काजी वाहिद अली ने कहा कि अग्निवेश ने मानवतावादी सेवा कार्य किए। जेएनवीयू के पूर्व कुलपति बीएस राजपुरोहित ने कहा कि स्वामीजी वैचारिक क्रांति के योद्धा थे। बीकानेर विवि के पूर्व कुलपति गंगाराम जाखड़ ने कहा कि स्वामी अग्निवेश के बताए रास्ते पर चलने की जरूरत है।

शिक्षाविद मोहम्मद अतीक, गोपीकिशन, मनोज कुमार परिहार, नरेंद्र कुशवाह, किशनसिंह, नारायणसिंह, भंवरलाल हटवाल, आजम जोधपुरी, हेमंत शर्मा, अश्विनी दास, डह. लक्ष्मणसिंह, भंवरलाल आर्य, हरिसिंह आर्य ने भी संबोधित किया। संवालन विनोद गहलौत ने किया। उम्रेद सिंह आर्य ने आभार जताया। स्वामी अग्निवेश के खिलाफ सोशल मीडिया पर नफरत व जहर भरे शब्द उगलने वाले पूर्व आईपीएस नागेश्वर राव के खिलाफ आंदोलन व कानूनी कार्रवाई करने का प्रस्ताव लिया गया।

**Former Member of the
Haryana Legislative Assembly
(1977-1982)**

Minister of Education in Haryana 1979

Founder-Chairperson of Bandhwa Mukti Morcha (Bonded Labour Liberation Front) since 1981. President Emeritus Sarvadeshik Arya Pratinidhi Sabha (World Council of Arya Samaj) since 2004 to 2014 Former Chairperson of the United Nations Trust Fund on Contemporary Forms of Slavery (January 1994 to December 2004). Former Board Of Director of KALCID (King Abdullah Bin Abdul Aziz International Center for Interreligious, Intercultural Dialogue) since 2012 to 2017. Right Livelihood Award (Alternative Nobel Prize) in Sweden and Freedom and Human Rights Award in Bern, Switzerland-2004., Rajiv Gandhi Sadbhavana Award-2004., Former Vice President-International Niwano Peace Prize Committee, Tokyo (January 2003 to 2005)

Member-International Peace Council (since January 2003), Founder Convenor-Sarva Dharma Sansad (Parliament of All Religions-India) since 5th October, 2007.

Global Trustee of URI, United Religion Initiative, Co-founder of URI & rsquo;s Religions for Social Justice Cooperation Circle, which has been a powerful force for interfaith harmony and cooperation in India.

RENOWNED SOCIAL ACTIVIST SWAMI AGNIVESH PASSES AWAY

The Indian Express
11th September, 2020

Swami Agnivesh was widely known for his campaign against bonded labour through his foundation Bandhua Mukti Morcha (Bonded Labor Liberation Front).

For those of us battling the corrosive cancer of communalism, it was Swami's vision of Indian society and state as multi-hued and diverse, based on an unflinching commitment to secularism and rationality, that was so special.

Social activist and Arya Samaj leader Swami Agnivesh passed away Friday at the Institute of Liver and Biliary Sciences in New Delhi. He was 80.

Agnivesh had been suffering from liver cirrhosis and was put on ventilatory support on Tuesday due to multiple organ failure.

"His condition deteriorated today and he went into cardiac arrest at 6-00 p.m. Resuscitation was attempted but the stalwart passed away at 6-45 p.m.," said a statement by the Institute of Liver and Biliary Sciences.

Born into a Brahmin family in Andhra Pradesh, Swami Agnivesh came to be known for his campaign against bonded labour through his foundation Bandhua Mukti Morcha (Bonded Labor Liberation Front). His public work spurred him to enter active politics.

Swami Agnivesh : My ideal of social justice runs counter to the casteism of Sangh Parivar.

He was elected to the Haryana Assembly in 1977 and was made education minister after two years. He, however, resigned from the post in protest against the Haryana government's in action against police who had opened fire at workers protesting bonded labour.

Swami Agnivesh also led several initiatives to foster peace and interfaith harmony in Kashmir at the height of militancy, his website notes. In 2010, he was tasked by the Congress government to open a dialogue with the Maoist leadership. A year later he was part of the anti-corruption movement led by Anna Hazare. He was forced to split from the group after a video surfaced allegedly showing him speaking to a minister from the Congress government. It was around this time that Swami Agnivesh appeared on reality TV show Bigg Boss as a guest.

Swami Agnivesh, who was president of World Council of Arya Samaj till 2014, had also angered Hindu groups for his comments on Amarnath shrine in Jammu & Kashmir. Agnivesh, they alleged, insulted Lord Shiva by saying that the ice stalagmite doesn't hold any religious significance.

In 2018, he was attacked by protesters allegedly belonging to the BJP's youth wing in Jharkhand. Videos of the attack showed protesters asking Agnivesh to "go back" while calling him a "Pakistani agent".

A month later, Agnivesh was assaulted on Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Marg in New Delhi on his way to pay tribute to former prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee.

विनम्र श्रद्धांजलि !

- Anand Kumar

दिनांक ११ सितम्बर २०२० को आर्य संन्यासी स्वामी अग्निवेश जी का अस्मिताल में दुःखद देहावसान हो गया।

स्वामी अग्निवेश जी स्वभाव से विद्वेही थे। उनको किन्हीं निर्धारित मापदंडों के भीतर नियंत्रित करके रखना बहुत कठिन था। यही उनकी विशेषता थी तथा यही उनकी समस्या भी थी। स्वामी समर्पणानन्द जी जैसे सुधी संन्यासी से वैदिक सिद्धान्तों की शिक्षा पायी थी। प्रो. रमाकान्त उपाध्याय जैसे आर्य विद्वान् ने उन्हें आर्यसमाज में दीक्षित किया था। महर्षि दयानन्द और आर्य समाज का ऐसा रंग चढ़ा कि भरी जवानि में प्रोफेसर की नौकरी को ठुकराकर आर्य राष्ट्र के निर्माण का संकल्प लेकर हरियाणा को कार्यक्षेत्र बनाकर आर्यसमाज की विचारधारा को जनजन तक पहुँचाने के कार्य में लग गये। त्याग का ऐसा जीवन्त उदाहरण विरले ही देखने को मिलता है।

यह वह समय था जब स्वामी जी के भाषणों को सुनने के लिये नवयुवक दूर दूर से आते थे और आर्यसमाज से जुड़ने के लिये प्रेरणा प्राप्त करते थे। स्थिति ऐसी थी कि बड़े बड़े नेता उनके सामने बौने लगते थे जब उनके प्रतिस्पर्धी उनका सामना करने में अपने आपको असहाय पा रहे थे तब उन्होंने उनके बारे में अफवाहें फैलाना शुरू कर दिया। वामपंथी और नक्सली कहना शुरू कर दिया। जातिवाद का भी खेल खेला गया। किसी ने उन्हें इस्लाम का एजेंट कहा। किसी ने उन्हें ईसाईयों का पिछू बताया। जब कि वास्तविकता यह है वह केवल महर्षि दयानन्द के भक्त थे। वेदों के प्रति उनकी अनन्य निष्ठा थी और अन्त समय तक बनी रही।

वे बहुत प्रतिभाशाली व्यक्ति थे। वे अकेले ऐसे संन्यासी थे जो कि अन्तर्राष्ट्रीय मंचों पर महर्षि के सिद्धान्तों की बहुत उपयुक्त व्याख्या करते थे। हिन्दी और अंग्रेजी में धाराप्रवाह लिख और बोल सकते थे। एक विशेषता यह भी थी कि वे सामने वाले व्यक्ति के पद और प्रतिष्ठा के कारण बिना प्रभावित हुये अपनी बात निर्भीकता से कहने की क्षमता थी। ऐसे विलक्षण संन्यासी के निधन से आर्यसमाज और पूरे मानव समाज को अपूरणीय क्षति हुई है। मैं अपनी ओर से, अपने राशिचर्यों की ओर से एवं राष्ट्र निर्माण पार्टी की ओर से स्वामी अग्निवेश जी को अश्रु पूरित भावभीनी श्रद्धांजलि देता हूँ।

डा. आनंद कुमार, आई पी एस
राष्ट्रीय महासचिव, राष्ट्र निर्माण पार्टी

स्वामी अग्निवेश जी को अश्वपूर्ण श्रद्धांजलि !

(२९.०९.१९३९ से ११.०९.२०२०)

-डा मुमुक्षु झाव

इककासी वर्ष की आयु में स्वामी अग्निवेश जी ने आज अपनी नश्वर देह का त्याग कर दिया । आशा है अब तक स्वामी अग्निवेश जी का पुनर्जन्म भी हो गया होगा और कुछ वर्षों बाद पुनः ऋषि मिशन व समाज सेवा के अधूरे काम को पूरा करने में जुट जाएंगे । भारत माता के महान सपूत, महान समाज सुधारक, गरीबों के मसीहा, राष्ट्र भक्त, ऋषि भक्त , क्रान्तिकारी आर्य सन्यासी स्वामी अग्निवेश जी आज हमारे बीच नहीं रहे । स्वामी अग्निवेश जी ने युवावस्था में सन्यास लेकर सामाजिक राजनीतिक व आध्यात्मिक क्षेत्र में निरन्तर संघर्ष किया था । वे ऋषि दयानन्द की तरह बड़ी निर्भिकता से समाज में फैली कुरितियों, अनधिविश्वासों व पाखंडों पर प्रहार करते थे ।

२००४ के वैकल्पिक नोबेल शांति पुरस्कार (द राइट लाइवलीहुड अवार्ड) के विजेता स्वामी अग्निवेश ने २८ वर्ष की छोटी उम्र में कलकत्ता में कानून और प्रबंधन के प्रोफेसर के रूप में अपना करियर छोड़ दिया था । दक्षिण भारतीय ब्राह्मण परिवार में जन्में अग्निवेश ने अपना नाम, जाति, धर्म, परिवार और अपने सभी सामान और संपत्ति को एक 'स्वामी' का जीवन अपनाने के लिए छोड़ दिया और सामाजिक न्याय एवं दया के लिए अपने जीवन की शुरुआत की । स्वामी अग्निवेश आर्य समाज के सबसे प्रतिष्ठित विश्व प्रसिद्ध नेता हैं ।

मुसलमानों के बीच जाकर कब पूजा और बकरीद पर जानवरों की कुर्बानी को गलत कहना, सत्याभ्रंशकाश व वेद को महिमाभिहित करना, संगठन सूक्त जैसे वेदमंत्र बोलना, सऊदी अरब के शेख को सत्याभ्रंशकाश भेंट करना, शिक्षा मंत्री के पद को ठोकर मारना, सती प्रथा को खत्म करने के लिए और लोगों में इसके विरुद्ध जनजागृति के लिए दिल्ली से देवराला तक पदयात्रा निकालने की हिम्मत करना, लाखों बन्धु पुत्रा मजदूरों को बड़े संघर्ष के बाद मुक्त करवाना, शराब की बिक्री व गौहत्या पर पूर्ण प्रतिबंध के लिए भी निरन्तर आवाज उठाना..... ऐसे ऐसे समाज सुधार के अनेक काम स्वामी अग्निवेश करते आ रहे थे । विरोधी लोगों की प्रतिक्रिया देखकर ऋषि दयानन्द के वचन याद आते हैं- "अग्रिय लेकिन कल्याणकारक वचन कहने और सुनने वाले लोग बहुत कम होते हैं, सच्चा सन्यासी वही होता है जो हमेशा सत्य बोले और अपने अपमान को भी अमृत के समान समझे ।" संघ व भाजपा के कहरपशी लोग उनके बारे में

अपशब्दों और गालीगलौज का प्रयोग कर अपनी नीचता का प्रदर्शन करते रहते हैं । स्वामी जी ने हिन्दुओं, मुसलमानों, ईसाईयों आदि सभी मत-मतांतरों व राजनेताओं के पाखंड पर प्रहार किया है, ईश्वर के सच्चे स्वरूप को सबके सामने रखा है और गणशक्ति ईश्वरीय वाणी वेद का प्रचार प्रसार किया है । दो वर्ष पूर्व पाकुड़ झारखंड में भाजपा के लोगों ने उन पर जानलेवा हमला किया था, तब से ही वे अस्वस्थ चल रहे थे । स्वामी अग्निवेश जी को मारने वाले वास्तव में भाजपा के ये लोग व नेता ही हैं । कुछ योगदान उन तथाकथित आर्यसमाजियों का भी है जो उनके बारे में अंडबंड बकते रहते हैं । स्वामी अग्निवेश जी पर जानलेवा हमले करने वाले और उनको गालियां देने वाले वास्तव में उन्हीं धूर्तों की सन्तान प्रतीत होते हैं जिन्होंने स्वामी दयानन्द को बहुत सताया था और उन्हें अनेक बार विष दिया था ।

परमपिता परमेश्वर उनके विश्वबन्धुत्व के स्वप्न को साकार करें ।

CONDOLENCE MESSAGE

Monday, 14th September 2020

To: Swami Agnivesh <agnivesh70@gmail.com>

The passing away of Swami Agnivesh Ji is really shocking for us and we are grieved at his sad demise. Iran Culture House, New Delhi conveys its heartfelt condolence to the bereaved relatives and friends and prays to almighty for giving strength to them for bearing this irreparable loss.

Dr. Mohd. Ali Rabbani

Cultural Counselor & Head Iran Culture House, New Delhi
From: Iran Culture House-New Delhi,
<ichdelhi@gmail.com>

CONDOLENCES FROM GAYA PUCL

From: shah_rajan1962@yahoo.in,

<shah_rajan1962@yahoo.in>, 14th September 2020

To: agnivesh70@gmail.com <agnivesh70@gmail.com>

Cc: rshah@justiceventures.org

<rshah@justiceventures.org>

Respected Sir,

Greetings please accept the Heart felt condolences from the Gaya PUCL unit on the sad and untimely demise of our beloved Swamiji may the soul of the Swami be in peace and solace to all his followers. He will be remembered for his contributions to the rescue of bonded labourers and support for the Dalits.

Thanks

Rajan Shah

President Gaya PUCL



विज्ञान निर्मलता नीति

Maharashtra Andhshradha Nirmulan Samiti

[Committee for Eradication of Superstition]

Head Office : 'Tarangar' Kunda Smriti Kendra, 12, United Western Bank Colony, Shahu Nagar,

Godoli, Satara-415001 ☎ : (02162) 220659

Office : 'Bhaskar', 68, Kalikadevi Nagar, Sanghama Chowk, Golbar Tekdi Road, Dhule.-424001

Cell : +91 -9422790610,8975130609 Email : avinashpalitmans@gmail.com

मानवर स्वामी आयश्वरा जी,
कर्मकर्तारी अध्यक्ष,
बंधुआ मुक्ती मोर्चा,
प्रधान सार्वश्रिक
आर्य प्रतिनिधी सभा, नई दिल्ली.

प्रो. विठ्ठलराय आर्य,
महामंत्री, सार्वश्रिक
आर्य प्रतिनिधी सभा, नई दिल्ली.

दिनांक १८ सप्टेंबर २०२०

महोदय,
विषय: स्वामी अग्निवेश जी को विनम्र आदरांजली

हम विनम्रता से कहते हैं की, स्वामी अग्निवेश जी और महाराष्ट्र अंधश्रद्धा निर्मूलन समिती का वैचारिक नजदिक का रिस्ता था. शाहिद डाक्टर नरेंद्र दाभोलकर और स्वामीजी के बहुत सारे विचार एक ही थे.

डा. नरेंद्र दाभोलकर इन्हिके शत्रुता के बाद हम दिल्ली में जंतर मंतर पे "जवाब दो", "हिंसा के खिलाफ मानवता की ओर आंदोलन में हर साल वे हमारे साथ थे.महाराष्ट्र अनिस और धनक, नई दिल्ली इनके नेतृत्व में देशमें उन्नत जातीथ, अंतरधर्मीय विवाद की गती बढाने के लिये स्वी स्टार पर एक "चयन" नापाक प्लेटफर्द्धा बनाया गया. उसका उन्हेमें स्वागत किया था और इस गंव पर आकर इस काम को आगे ले जाने के लिये मैं आपके साथ हू ऐसा वादा भी किया था.

महो. अनिस द्वारा आयोजित "धार्मिक दृष्टशत्रुता और अराष्ट्रिज्जा के खिलाफ राज्य स्तर पर परिषद पूना और मुंबई में वे प्रमुख अतिथी थे.स्वामीजी अंधविश्वास, कर्मभंड, सति की लज्जास्पद प्रथा, बालविधवा की दुर्लशा इसके खिलाफ थे. वे भगवें वनज में अंधविश्वास के खिलाफ काम करने वाले कर्मकर्ता, बंधुआ मुक्ती मोर्चा के वे संस्थापक थे.

इन्ही कारणरसा उनके उपर संप्रताधिक विचारधारा के लोभो ने बार बार हमले किये इसकी हम निंदा करते हैं और स्वामी अग्निवेश जी को हम महाराष्ट्र अंधश्रद्धा निर्मूलन समिति, दिल्ली अंधविश्वास उन्मुलन समिति, फेडरेशन आफ इंडियन रेशनालिस्ट असोसिएशन और भारत जोड़ो युवा अवकामी को और से विनम्र आदरांजली व्यक्त करते हैं.

भवदीय

अविनाश पाटील, कर्मकर्तारी अध्यक्ष,
महो. अनिस तथा, राष्ट्रीय उपाध्यक्ष,

माधव बावरे, राज्य प्रधान सचिव,
महाराष्ट्र अंधश्रद्धा निर्मूलन

फेडरेशन फेडरेशन आफ इंडियन फेडरेशन तथा भारत जोड़ो युवा अवकामी. मोबाइल ८४२२४६८५६४



Suvarni'ki ko paramam! Suvarni'ki
ko Zindabad!

Suvarni'ki was a highly worker for
reign in freedom & provides labour
communication - He brought country
against religion bigotry & the
rites of hatred, and against
bonded and child labour.

He began a huge vacuum - his dis
in the former words lives -

Harsh Mardar

यह निश्चयना है कि मेरे जैसे व्यक्तिओं का

अहिंसार और क्षुब्धता, महापुरुष जिस मिशन के महान
कार्य कर रहे होते हैं उसमें पूरी तरह इस
जर्नी पाने । स्वामी जी से जिस तरह का
रुनेह मिलता था, वह उस किससे मिलेगा।
ईश्वर उसको कार्य और चार को हमारे जैसे
कार्यगोद लोको का सम्बल बनाये - इसी कामना
के साथ अहो जालि -

समाजवादी समाजम - विजय भनाप
- वसुधैव कुटुम्बकम्

हमारे अभियोग स्वीकारना मत की पहल
के साथे हमारे प्रत्यक्ष हिंस्र समाज की
उत्पत्ति पहल को उद्योगी समाज द्वारा अभिनि
र्वाहना की सेवा ही समाज स्वीकार है, यह
साथ हमारे समाज स्वीकार समाज अब कार्य में
मौज था अभिनिर्वाहना और स्वीकारिता मौजमान
है, ऐसे में समाज की मौज और स्वीकारिता।

समाज की मौज स्वीकारिता।

12 डिसेंबर 2020.

योगेश्वर
योगेश्वर, समाज स्वीकारिता।

Henri Tiphagne Executive Director People's Watch Tamilnadu

Thank you for your courage and standing up
for those who needed a voice and
representation. You will be dearly
missed. The fight continues!

With love

Henri Tiphagne, Katherine
and Aina Tiphagne

रविशर्मा

WZA
GWS

1. 2. 3. 4. 5. 6. 7. 8. 9. 10. 11. 12. 13. 14. 15. 16. 17. 18. 19. 20. 21. 22. 23. 24. 25. 26. 27. 28. 29. 30. 31. 32. 33. 34. 35. 36. 37. 38. 39. 40. 41. 42. 43. 44. 45. 46. 47. 48. 49. 50. 51. 52. 53. 54. 55. 56. 57. 58. 59. 60. 61. 62. 63. 64. 65. 66. 67. 68. 69. 70. 71. 72. 73. 74. 75. 76. 77. 78. 79. 80. 81. 82. 83. 84. 85. 86. 87. 88. 89. 90. 91. 92. 93. 94. 95. 96. 97. 98. 99. 100. 101. 102. 103. 104. 105. 106. 107. 108. 109. 110. 111. 112. 113. 114. 115. 116. 117. 118. 119. 120. 121. 122. 123. 124. 125. 126. 127. 128. 129. 130. 131. 132. 133. 134. 135. 136. 137. 138. 139. 140. 141. 142. 143. 144. 145. 146. 147. 148. 149. 150. 151. 152. 153. 154. 155. 156. 157. 158. 159. 160. 161. 162. 163. 164. 165. 166. 167. 168. 169. 170. 171. 172. 173. 174. 175. 176. 177. 178. 179. 180. 181. 182. 183. 184. 185. 186. 187. 188. 189. 190. 191. 192. 193. 194. 195. 196. 197. 198. 199. 200. 201. 202. 203. 204. 205. 206. 207. 208. 209. 210. 211. 212. 213. 214. 215. 216. 217. 218. 219. 220. 221. 222. 223. 224. 225. 226. 227. 228. 229. 230. 231. 232. 233. 234. 235. 236. 237. 238. 239. 240. 241. 242. 243. 244. 245. 246. 247. 248. 249. 250. 251. 252. 253. 254. 255. 256. 257. 258. 259. 260. 261. 262. 263. 264. 265. 266. 267. 268. 269. 270. 271. 272. 273. 274. 275. 276. 277. 278. 279. 280. 281. 282. 283. 284. 285. 286. 287. 288. 289. 290. 291. 292. 293. 294. 295. 296. 297. 298. 299. 300. 301. 302. 303. 304. 305. 306. 307. 308. 309. 310. 311. 312. 313. 314. 315. 316. 317. 318. 319. 320. 321. 322. 323. 324. 325. 326. 327. 328. 329. 330. 331. 332. 333. 334. 335. 336. 337. 338. 339. 340. 341. 342. 343. 344. 345. 346. 347. 348. 349. 350. 351. 352. 353. 354. 355. 356. 357. 358. 359. 360. 361. 362. 363. 364. 365. 366. 367. 368. 369. 370. 371. 372. 373. 374. 375. 376. 377. 378. 379. 380. 381. 382. 383. 384. 385. 386. 387. 388. 389. 390. 391. 392. 393. 394. 395. 396. 397. 398. 399. 400. 401. 402. 403. 404. 405. 406. 407. 408. 409. 410. 411. 412. 413. 414. 415. 416. 417. 418. 419. 420. 421. 422. 423. 424. 425. 426. 427. 428. 429. 430. 431. 432. 433. 434. 435. 436. 437. 438. 439. 440. 441. 442. 443. 444. 445. 446. 447. 448. 449. 450. 451. 452. 453. 454. 455. 456. 457. 458. 459. 460. 461. 462. 463. 464. 465. 466. 467. 468. 469. 470. 471. 472. 473. 474. 475. 476. 477. 478. 479. 480. 481. 482. 483. 484. 485. 486. 487. 488. 489. 490. 491. 492. 493. 494. 495. 496. 497. 498. 499. 500. 501. 502. 503. 504. 505. 506. 507. 508. 509. 510. 511. 512. 513. 514. 515. 516. 517. 518. 519. 520. 521. 522. 523. 524. 525. 526. 527. 528. 529. 530. 531. 532. 533. 534. 535. 536. 537. 538. 539. 540. 541. 542. 543. 544. 545. 546. 547. 548. 549. 550. 551. 552. 553. 554. 555. 556. 557. 558. 559. 560. 561. 562. 563. 564. 565. 566. 567. 568. 569. 570. 571. 572. 573. 574. 575. 576. 577. 578. 579. 580. 581. 582. 583. 584. 585. 586. 587. 588. 589. 590. 591. 592. 593. 594. 595. 596. 597. 598. 599. 600. 601. 602. 603. 604. 605. 606. 607. 608. 609. 610. 611. 612. 613. 614. 615. 616. 617. 618. 619. 620. 621. 622. 623. 624. 625. 626. 627. 628. 629. 630. 631. 632. 633. 634. 635. 636. 637. 638. 639. 640. 641. 642. 643. 644. 645. 646. 647. 648. 649. 650. 651. 652. 653. 654. 655. 656. 657. 658. 659. 660. 661. 662. 663. 664. 665. 666. 667. 668. 669. 670. 671. 672. 673. 674. 675. 676. 677. 678. 679. 680. 681. 682. 683. 684. 685. 686. 687. 688. 689. 690. 691. 692. 693. 694. 695. 696. 697. 698. 699. 700. 701. 702. 703. 704. 705. 706. 707. 708. 709. 710. 711. 712. 713. 714. 715. 716. 717. 718. 719. 720. 721. 722. 723. 724. 725. 726. 727. 728. 729. 730. 731. 732. 733. 734. 735. 736. 737. 738. 739. 740. 741. 742. 743. 744. 745. 746. 747. 748. 749. 750. 751. 752. 753. 754. 755. 756. 757. 758. 759. 760. 761. 762. 763. 764. 765. 766. 767. 768. 769. 770. 771. 772. 773. 774. 775. 776. 777. 778. 779. 780. 781. 782. 783. 784. 785. 786. 787. 788. 789. 790. 791. 792. 793. 794. 795. 796. 797. 798. 799. 800. 801. 802. 803. 804. 805. 806. 807. 808. 809. 810. 811. 812. 813. 814. 815. 816. 817. 818. 819. 820. 821. 822. 823. 824. 825. 826. 827. 828. 829. 830. 831. 832. 833. 834. 835. 836. 837. 838. 839. 840.

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స్వామి అగ్నివేష్ ఇకలేరు

- ఢిల్లీలో కన్నుమూసిన సామాజిక ఉద్యమ నేత
- కాలేయ వ్యాధితో కొద్దిరోజులుగా చికిత్స
- తెలంగాణ ఉద్యమానికి తొలినుంచీ మద్దతు
- ముఖ్యమంత్రి కేసీఆర్ సంతాపం

న్యూఢిల్లీ, సెప్టెంబర్ 11: ప్రముఖ సామాజిక ఉద్యమకారుడు, ఆర్యసమాజ్ నాయకుడు స్వామి అగ్నివేష్ (80) శుక్రవారం కన్నుమూశారు. కొద్దిరోజులుగా కాలేయ సంబంధ అనారోగ్యంతో ఢిల్లీలోని ఇన్స్టిట్యూట్ ఆఫ్ లివర్ అండ్ బిలియరీ సైన్సెస్లో చికిత్స పొందుతున్న ఆయనకు శుక్రవారం సాయంత్రం గుండెపోటు రావడంతో తుది శ్వాస విడిచారు. దేశం నలుమూలలా జరిగిన అగ్నిరేఖల ప్రజా ఉద్యమాలకు చెప్పుదమ్ముగా నిలిచిన స్వామి అగ్నివేష్.. వెట్టిదాకీరి, మహిళా సమస్యలపై ప్రత్యేకంగా సుదీర్ఘ పోరాటం చేశారు. తెలంగాణ

ప్రత్యేక రాష్ట్ర ఉద్యమానికి సంపూర్ణ మద్దతు ప్రకటించి అనేక సభల్లో ప్రసంగించారు.

శ్రీకాకుళంలో జననం

స్వామి అగ్నివేష్ 1939 సెప్టెంబర్ 21న శ్రీకాకుళంలో జన్మించారు. ఆయన అసలు పేరు వేపాశ్వామీరామ్. నాలుగేండ్ల వయసులోనే తండ్రిని కోల్పోయారు. న్యాయ, ఆర్థికశాస్త్రాల్లో పట్టాలు సాధించి కోల్ కతాలోని సెయింట్ జేమీయర్ కాలేజీలో లెక్చరర్ గా పనిచేశారు. సుప్రీంకోర్టు ప్రధాన న్యాయమూర్తిగా బాధ్యతలు చేపట్టిన సవ్యసాది ముఖర్జీ న్యాయవాదిగా ఉన్నప్పుడు



సీఎం కేసీఆర్ తో స్వామి అగ్నివేష్ (పై)

అగ్నివేష్ ఆయన కింద జూనియర్ గా పనిచేశారు. ఉద్యమాలతో మమేకం

చిన్న వయసులోనే ప్రజా ఉద్యమాల వైపు ఆకర్షితుడైన అగ్నివేష్ 1968లో ఆర్యసమాజ్ లో చేరి సన్యాసం స్వీకరించారు. 1970లో ఆర్యసభను స్థాపించారు. 1977లో ఎమ్మెల్యేగా గెలిచారు. 1979లో విద్యాశాఖ మంత్రిగా పనిచేశారు. అప్పుడే 1981లో వెట్టిదాకీరి నిర్మాణం కోసం 'లాండ్స్ లెవర్ లిబరేషన్ ఫ్రంట్'ను ఏర్పాటు చేశారు. ఢిల్లీ చుట్టుపక్కల క్వార్టర్స్ బానిసలుగా మగ్గుతున్న ఎంతోమందికి విముక్తి కల్పించారు. ఆర్యసమాజ్ అత్యున్నత మండలి అయిన చరణ్ కౌన్సిల్ కు 2004 నుంచి 2014వరకు అగ్నివేష్ అధ్యక్షుడిగా ఉన్నారు. ఐరాస ఆధ్వర్యంలోని బానిసత్వ నిర్మూలన త్రుస్టుకు 1994 నుంచి 2004 వరకు ఛైర్మన్ గా కూడా కొనసాగారు.

సీఎం కేసీఆర్ తీవ్ర దిగ్భ్రాంతి

స్వామి అగ్నివేష్ కన్నుమూతపై ముఖ్యమంత్రి కేసీఆర్ తీవ్ర దిగ్భ్రాంతి వ్యక్తం చేశారు. తెలంగాణ రాష్ట్ర సాధన ఉద్యమానికి ఆయన మొదటి గుంటి మద్దతుగా నిలిచారని గుర్తు చేశారు. ఉద్యమ సందర్భంలో జరిగిన అనేక సమావేశాలు, కార్యక్రమాల్లో పాల్గొన్నారని పేర్కొన్నారు. స్వామి అగ్నివేష్ చ్యుతికి రాష్ట్ర మంత్రులు హాజరై దీనిని నిరంజన్ రెడ్డి, నోలెర్ శాంతిబహుమతి గ్రహీత కైలాష్ సత్యార్థి, కాంగ్రెస్ నేత శివధర్మర్, ప్రముఖ న్యాయవాది ప్రకాశ్ కుమార్ తదితరులు సంతాపం తెలిపారు.

తెలంగాణ ఉద్యమానికి సంపూర్ణ మద్దతు

స్వామి అగ్నివేష్ తెలంగాణ ఉద్యమానికి తొలి నుంచి సంపూర్ణ మద్దతు ప్రకటించారు. తెలంగాణ రాష్ట్రం ఇవ్వాలన్నదేనని బాతీయ, అంతర్జాతీయ వేదికలపై బలంగా వాదించారు. నాటి ఉద్యమ సారథి, సీడీ తెలంగాణ సీఎం కేసీఆర్, తెలంగాణ సిద్ధాంతకర్త ప్రొఫెసర్ జయశంకర్ తదితరులతో సుదీర్ఘంగా తెలంగాణ ఉద్యమంపై చర్చించిన బాతీయస్థాయి నాయకుల్లో అగ్నివేష్ ఒకరు. 2008 ఏప్రిల్ 27న వరంగల్ లో జరిగిన టీఆర్ఎస్ వార్షికోత్సవ సభకు మాజీ ప్రధాని దేవోదత్ జిఎస్ వర్మి లక్షల మంది ప్రజల సమక్షంలో తెలంగాణ ఉద్యమానికి స్వామి అగ్నివేష్ మద్దతు ప్రకటించారు. 2010లో వరంగల్ లో టీఆర్ఎస్ నిర్వహించిన తెలంగాణ మహాగర్వన సభలో కూడా పాల్గొన్నారు.

समाज के विभिन्न वर्गों के लोगों ने स्वामी अग्निवेश को दी श्रद्धांजलि

अमर उजाला, नई दिल्ली
23rd September 2020

स्वामी अग्निवेश ने लिए आगोजित श्रद्धांजलि सभा-फोटो :



रक्षिवादिता के विरुद्ध हमेशा अपनी आवाज बुलंद करने वाले स्वामी अग्निवेश के जाने पर समाज का प्रबुद्ध वर्ग चितित और शोकाकुल है। उनके देहावसान पर लगातार श्रद्धांजलि कार्यक्रम आयोजित किए जा रहे हैं और लोग उन्हें अपने श्रद्धा सुमन अर्पित कर रहे हैं। इसी क्रम में मंगलवार को वर्ल्ड पीस अहर्गोनाइजेशन के एक कार्यक्रम में स्वामी अग्निवेश को श्रद्धांजलि दी गई। इसमें विभिन्न समाज के लोगों ने स्वामी अग्निवेश की जीवन यात्रा और उनके किए गए कार्यों को याद किया।

वरलुड पीस अर्गनाइजेशन के जनरल सेक्रेटरी मौलाना मोहम्मद एजाज उर रहमान शाहीन कासमी ने उन्हें समाज सुधार को समर्पित चोखा बताया और कहा कि आज समाज में समरसता स्थापित करने के लिए देश को हर गली, हर मुहल्ले में एक अग्निवेश की जरूरत है। यह सभा तरिगया हल में आयोजित की गई। इसमें बहादुर लोटरा टैपल रो ए.के. मर्चेंट, इन्स्टिट्यूट आफ पीस एंड हार्मनी से एम.डी. धामस, जमात ए इस्लामी हिंद के सेक्रेटरी इंतजार नईम साहब, स्वामी अग्निवेश के सेक्रेटरी जावेद साहब, बांधुआ भुक्ति मोर्चा के पदाधिकारी निर्मल और लोग शामिल हुए।



స్వామి అగ్నివేష్ ఇకలేరు అనారోగ్యంతో ఢిల్లీలో కన్నుమూత

పుట్టింది ఏపీలోని త్రికాకుళంలో
తండ్రి మృతితో చటన్ గడ్డకు
సామాజిక పోరాటాల్లోనే జీవితం
వెట్టిచాకిరి నిరూపనకు టీడ్ర కృషి
హరియాణాలో రాజకీయ జీవితం
ఎమెల్త్యేగా గెలిచి.. విద్యా మంత్రిగా !



ఆర్య సమూహ్ నేత, ప్రముఖ సామాజిక కార్యకర్త.. స్వామి అగ్నివేష్ (81) ఇక లేరు. కొంతకాలంగా కాలేయ సమస్య (లివర్ సిరోసిస్)తో బాధపడుతున్న ఆయన ఢిల్లీలోని ఇన్స్టిట్యూట్ ఆఫ్ లివర్ ట్రైలియం సైన్సెస్ (ఐఎల్ఐఎస్)లో చికిత్స పొందుతున్నారు.





మీరూ సన్యాసం తీసుకోండి..

హక్కుల ఉద్యమంలో భాగంగా స్వామి అగ్నివేళ్ ఒక సారి ఏపీకి వచ్చారు. అప్పుడు ఏపీ సీఎంగా ఉన్న ఎన్టీ రామారావు వద్దకు వెళ్లారు. కాషాయ వస్త్రాల్లో అగ్నివేళ్ను చూసి, 'మీరు సన్యాసం ఎందుకు తీసుకున్నారు?' అని ఎన్టీయార్ అడిగారు. 'సన్యాసిగా ఉంటే ఎలాంటి స్వార్థం ఉండదు. మన కోసం కాకుండా ఇతరులు, సమాజం కోసం పనిచేస్తాం. మీరూ విజ్ఞానీగా పనిచేయండి. సన్యాసం తీసుకోండి' అని ఎన్టీయార్ కు అగ్నివేళ్ సమాధానమిచ్చారు. అగ్నివేళ్ మాట ప్రభావమో లేక మరో ఇతర కారణమో.. ఎన్టీయార్ ఆ తర్వాతి కాలంలో కొన్నాళ్ళపాటు కాషాయం ధరించారు.

స్వామి అగ్నివేళ్ ఇకలేరు

(మొదటి పేజీ తరువాయి)

ఉన్న ఆయన ఆలోచన పరిస్థితి వివేచించడంతో శుక్ర వారం (సెప్టెంబర్ 11) సాయంత్రం ఆరున్నర గంటలకు తుది శ్వాస విడిచారు. శరీరులోని కీలక అవయవాలు విఫలం (మర్టీ ఆర్గాన్ డెయిల్యూర్) కావడంతో కార్మికాక్ ఆరెస్ట్ అయి ఆయన మృతిచెందినట్లు వైద్యులు ప్రకటించారు. శనివారం సాయంత్రం గురుగ్రామంలోని అగ్నిలోక్ ఆశ్రమంలో వైదిక వధిలో ఆయన అంత్యక్రియలు నిర్వహించనున్నట్లు ఆయన సన్నిహితులు చెప్పారు.

శ్రీకాకుళంలో పుట్టి..

స్వామి అగ్నివేళ్ అసలు పేరు.. వేపా శ్యామ్ రావు. ఆయన హాస్యకులది శ్రీకాకుళం జిల్లా, ఒడిశా రాష్ట్రం గుజాం జిల్లాలోని తెలుగు కుటుంబంలో 1939, సెప్టెంబరు 21న జన్మించారు (అప్పట్లో శ్రీకాకుళం జిల్లాలోని కొన్ని ప్రాంతాలు ఒడిశా రాష్ట్రంలో ఉండేవి). వారిది సనాతన బ్రాహ్మణ కుటుంబం. అగ్నివేళ్ కు నాలుగేళ్ల వయసులో తండ్రి మరణించారు. దీంతో ఆయన చర్చీస్ గడ్డలో తన తాతగారింటికి వెళ్లిపోయారు. అక్కడే అగ్నివేళ్ పెరిగారు. చిన్నప్పటి నుంచి సామాజిక అంశాలపై మక్కువ పెంచుకున్నారు. కోల్ కతాలోని సెయింట్ జేవియర్ కాలేజీ నుంచి లా, కామర్స్ లో పట్టా పొందారు. ఆ తర్వాత.. ప్రముఖ న్యాయవాదిగా పేరొందిన నవ్యసాచి ముఖర్జీ వద్ద జూనియర్ గా చేరి లా ప్రాక్టీస్ చేశారు. కానీ.. తన చదువుకు పరమార్థం చేకూర్చే ఉద్దేశంతో సామాజిక సమస్యలపై పోరాటానికి తన జీవితాన్ని అంకితం చేశారాయన. హరియాణాకు చెందిన స్వామి

ఇంద్రవేళ్ బావలకు ఆకర్షితులై అక్కడికి చేరుకున్నారు. తర్వాత అదే ఆయన కర్మభూమి అయ్యింది. చదువుకునేటప్పుడే ఆర్యసమాజ్ సిద్ధాంతాల పట్ల మక్కువ పెంచుకున్న అగ్నివేళ్ 1968లో ఆర్యసమాజ్ లో షల్ బైమ్ వర్క్ గా చేరారు. రెండేళ్ల తర్వాత.. 1970లో.. తాను సన్యాసాశ్రమం స్వీకరించిన రోజే.. ఆర్యసమాజ్ సిద్ధాంతాలతో 'ఆర్యసభ' పేరుతో ఒక రాజకీయ పార్టీని స్థాపించారు. స్వామి దయానంద సరస్వతి నుంచి గాంధీజీ, కార్లమార్క్స్ దాకా ఎందరో మహానుభావుల ప్రభావం తనపై ఉందని ఆయన చెప్పేవారు. రాజకీయ నాయకుడిగా హరియాణా హక్కుల కోసం ముందుండి పోరాడిన ఆయన.. వలమార్పు లని ఆయన జర్నలిస్టులను అడిగారు. వది జైలుకు వెళ్లారు. స్వామి ఇంద్రవేళ్ తో కలిసి హరియాణాలో రైతులకు కనీస మద్దతు ధర, సంహార మద్దతాపాన నిషేధం కోసం పోరాడారు. ఎమర్జెన్సీలో అజ్ఞాతంలోకి వెళ్లారు. అత్యయిక స్థితి ముగిశాక.. 1977 లో నిర్వహించిన ఎన్నికల్లో ఎమ్మెల్యేగా (హరియాణా నుంచి) ఎన్నికయ్యారు. 1979లో భజన్ దాస్ కేబినెట్ లో ఆ రాష్ట్ర విద్యా మంత్రిగా కూడా వ్యవహరించారు. ఆయన మంత్రి అయిన నాలుగు నెలలకే.. పరదాబాద్ పారిశ్రామిక టౌన్ షిప్ లో పోలీసుల పైరింగ్ లో 10 మంది కాల్కి

తెలుగులో సంతకం

1986లో ఒక కార్యక్రమానికి హాజరయ్యేందుకు స్వామి అగ్నివేళ్ హైదరాబాద్ కు వచ్చారు. ఈ సందర్భంగా ఆయనను జర్నలిస్టులు ఇంటర్వ్యూ చేశారు. అగ్నివేళ్ తెలుగు బాషను అర్థం చేసుకునే వారు. కానీ రాయడం రాదు. ఈ నేపథ్యంలో.. తన పేరు ఎలా రాయాలో నేర్పించాలని ఆయన జర్నలిస్టులను అడిగారు. వది నిమిషాల పాటు సాదన చేసి, తెలుగులో సంతకం చేయడం నేర్చుకున్నారు.

కులు చనిపోతే నిరసన తెలిపి, న్యాయవిచారణకు డిమాండ్ చేశారు. దీంతో ముఖ్యమంత్రి ఆయన్ను రాజీనామా చేయమని అడిగితే.. వెంటనే చేసేసి తన జీవితాన్ని ప్రజాపోరాటాలకు అంకితం చేశారు. 1981లో 'బంధు వా ముక్తి మోర్చా' (బాండెడ్ లెబర్ లిబరేషన్ ప్రంట్) స్థాపించి వెట్టికార్మికుల విముక్తి కోసం పోరాడారు. కార్యక్రమంలో ఆ సంస్థ దాదాపు 172 లక్షల మంది కార్మికులకు విముక్తి కల్పించింది. మాజీయస్థులతో చర్చలకు మధ్యవర్తిత్వం చేశారు. 1987లో రూపకన్యల్ అనే మహిళను బలవంతంగా ఆమె భర్త చితి మంటలపై పడేసిన మటనకు నిరసనగా..

డీటీ నుంచి రాజస్థాన్ లోని దేవరాలాకు 18 రోజుల పాదయాత్ర మొదలుపెట్టారు. అనంతరం రాజస్థాన్ సర్కారు సరి ప్రీవెన్షన్ యాక్ట్ ను అమల్లోకి తెచ్చింది. రాజస్థాన్ లోని నాథ్ ద్వారా ఆలయంలోకి దళితుల ప్రవేశంపై నిషేధం ఉండేది. 1988-89లో స్వామి అగ్నివేళ్ దానికి వ్యతిరేకంగా పోరాడారు. 2002లో గుజరాత్ అల్లర్లు జరిగిన సమయంలో 72 మంది మతపెద్దలతో అక్కడికి వెళ్లి ఐదు రోజులపాటు అక్కడే ఉన్నారు. ఇలా ఆయన జీవితమంతా మతతత్వానికి వ్యతిరేకంగా, అణగారినవర్గాల వారి హక్కుల కోసం, పోరాడారు. శ్రీకాకుళం జిల్లా సోంపేట దర్గాల్ విద్యుత్ కేంద్రం ఏర్పాటుకు వ్యతిరేకంగా చేపట్టిన బాల్ ఉద్యమానికి స్వామి అగ్నివేళ్ మధ్య ప్రకటించారు. అప్పట్లో స్వయంగా సోంపేట వచ్చారు. అప్పుడే తన సొంతప్రాంతం శ్రీకాకుళం జిల్లా ఆ ని వెళ్లడించారు. కాగా.. స్వామి అగ్నివేళ్ మృతి పట్ల పలువురు సంతాపం తెలిపారు. తెల్లెడాకిరీ నిర్మాలనకు ఎంతో కృషి చేశారని ఉపరాష్ట్రపతి వెంకయ్య గుర్తుచేసుకున్నారు.

संघर्षशील जुझारु नेता, हजारों के प्रेरणा श्रोत

स्वामी अग्निवेश जी

-डॉ. विठ्ठल राव आर्य

स्वामी अग्निवेश जी ने अपनी जीवन में अपने आर्य समाजिक जीवन के ५०-५५ वर्षों के काल में हजारों लोगों को प्रेरित किया है। आर्य समाज व बाहरी जगत के अन्य वर्गों और अनेक संस्थाओं से सम्बन्धित लोगों के लिए प्रेरणा के श्रोत रहें हैं चाहे वे आज दक्षिण पंथ हैं या वामपंथि या प्रगतिशील या मानवतावादी हैं। न्याय के लिए संघर्ष उनके जीवन का मुख्य हिस्सा रहा है विशेषकर गरीब के पक्ष में, समाज के अंतिम आदमी के पक्ष में, बंधुआ मजदूरों के पक्ष में तथा दलित, आदिवासी, महिलाओं और पिछड़े वर्ग के लोगों को न्याय दिलाने के हक में सदा रहे हैं। स्वामीजी मुखर होकर पूरे देश में और दुनिया में लोगों को जागरूक करने की मुहिम छेड़ रखी थी। पिछले दशाब्दियों के अंतराल में आप जैसा आध्यात्मवादी सामाजिक नेता नहीं देखा गया। आज समाज में बहुत सारे लोग अध्यात्म के नाम पर पूजा



पाठ, नामाज आदि करना मात्र मान लिया है। स्वामी जी का दृढ़ विश्वास था कि यह अध्यात्म नहीं, धर्म के नाम पर दिखावा है और पाखण्डों को प्रोत्साहित करने वाला है।

१९६५-६६ में स्वामी जी ने अपने सार्वजनिक जीवन की शुरुवात की थी। जीवन के प्रारंभिक दिनों में अपने चारों ओर फैले पाखण्ड के आवरण से छट-पटाते स्वामी जी को रूढ़ीवादी परंपराएं अखरती रही हैं। ऐसे समय आर्य समाज के सम्पर्क से पाखण्ड की परंपराओं को तोड़ते हुए एक प्रगतिशील वैदिक मान्यताओं के पुरोधा बन गए अतः जीवन के शुरु से ही एक क्रान्तिकारी नेता के रूप में उभरे। सड़े-गले समाज को बदलना ही उनका लक्ष्य रहा है। अतः हजारों-हजारों युवाओं को हमेशा प्रेरित करते रहे आर्य समाज में आज जितने भी लोग हैं उनमें अधिकतर स्वामी अग्निवेश जी से प्रेरित रहे हैं चाहे आज वह उनके पक्ष में हैं या खिलाफ। उनमें से मैं भी एक हूँ। अपनी १५-१६ साल की आयु में स्वामी दयानन्द जी के बाद अगर सामाजिक जीवन में काम करने की प्रेरणा किसी से मिली है तो वह स्वामी अग्निवेश जी है। स्वामी अग्निवेशी जी और स्वामी इन्द्रवेश जी की जोड़ी ने आर्य समाज के आर्य जगत में व बाह्य जगत में तहलका मचा दिया था। विद्यार्थी हो या, किसान हो या फिर अध्यापक व बुद्धिजीवी, सभी वर्गों में तहलका ही तहलका मचा रहा था। धार्मिक पाखण्ड के खिलाफ जबरदस्त प्रहार, परम्परागत कार्य करने वालों व पौराणिक लोगों के लिए विष समान था। यह बातें उनके गले में उतरती ही नहीं थी। इसी तरह जातिवाद के खिलाफ, साम्राज्यिकता के खिलाफ, भ्रष्टाचार के खिलाफ तथा नर-नारी समता के लिए एवं अभीर और गरीब की खाई को पाटने के लिए और मानवता के पक्ष में स्वामी अग्निवेश जी एक आवाज बने रहे। विश्व परिवर्तन का मिशन हो या इससे जुड़े सभी संगठनों और व्यक्तियों के मध्य एक प्रेरक सितारें बने रहे। अध्यात्म की अवधारणा को उन्होंने एक नया आयाम दिया। न्याय, करुणा, दया, प्रेम तथा आत्मीय संवेदना ईश्वर प्रेरक है, परमात्मा के लक्षण हैं। परमात्मा के गुणों को व्यक्ति अपने जीवन में धारण किए बिना, उस पर चले बिना तथा ऐसी व्यवस्था के लिए निरंतर संघर्ष किए बिना नया समाज, न्यायिक समाज की स्थापना नहीं की जा सकती। इसी बात को स्वामी अग्निवेश जी निरंतर कहते रहते थे। एकेश्वरवाद के सिद्धांत की जिस तरह राजनीतिक व्याख्या करके स्वामी जी ने विश्व सरकार के गठन का निष्कर्ष निकाला। **“यत्र विश्वं भवत्येक नीडम्”** में उनका दृढ़ विश्वास था



विश्व वेद सम्मेलन में सावदेशिक के मंत्री प्रो. विठ्ठल राव आर्य का सम्मान करते हुए स्वामी अग्निवेश जी साथ में साथी अशोक जी

ने विश्व सरकार के गठन का निष्कर्ष निकाला । “**यत्र विश्वं भवत्येक नीडम्**” में उनका दृढ़ विश्वास था इसीलिए “**वसुधैव कुटुम्बकम्**” की अवधारणा की वकालत हमेशा करते रहे । उनका यह भी मानना था कि संस्थागत ढांचे को मजबूत करने से पाखण्डवाद, भ्रष्टाचार आदि पनपता है अतः प्रवक्ता विचार को स्थापित करता है प्रतीकों को नहीं । दयानन्द प्रवक्ता थे, बुद्ध प्रवक्ता थे, दर्शनशास्त्री प्रवक्ता थे इन्होंने किसी प्रतीक परम्पराओं की स्थापना नहीं की । इसीलिए वेद की यह मान्यता कि परमात्मा निराकार है, समीचीन है । स्वामी दयानन्द सरस्वती ने भी इसी बात को आगे बढ़ाया और स्वामी अग्निवेश जी भी इसी बात को आगे बढ़ाने में तथा विश्व समाज को एक परिवार के रूप में देखना और बनाना चाहते थे । इसी संदर्भ में सीमाओं से परे विश्व सरकार बने यह उनकी आकांक्षा थी। परमात्मा ने ब्रह्माण्ड की रचना में पृथ्वी नामक एक गृह को भी बनाया है जिसपर सभी पशु, पक्षी, जीव, जंतु व आदमी किसी भी प्रकार के भेद-भाव के बिना रहे, जीएं । काले-गोरे, आदमी-औरत और अमीर-गरीब आदि का भेद-भाव लेश मात्र भी न हो । सभी के लिए न्यायिक व्यवस्था हो । प्रभू परमात्मा की इस न्यायिक व्यवस्था में दया, करुणा, प्रेम, न्याय, आत्मीयता बनी रहे । आदिमियों से ही परिवार नहीं, जीव, जंतु, पशु, पक्षी सभी मिलकर परिवार बनता है और स्वामी अग्निवेश जी अपनी जीवन के अंत तक इसी बात के लिए संवर्धशील रहे । जुझारू योद्धा रहे । निर्भिक होकर बात को कहने वाला और सत्य के पक्ष में व न्याय के पक्ष में खड़ा होने वाला सन्यासी स्वामी अग्निवेश जी थे । ऐसा व्यक्ति दशावधियों में भी शायद फिर पैदा हो ।

स्वामी अग्निवेश जी के अंतिम दिनों में मैं उनके साथ रहा । शायद उन्हें पता था कि उनके जीवन का समय कम रह गया है लेकिन वह यह चाहते थे कि उन्हें अभी बहुत काम करना है अतः परमात्मा उन्हें १०-१५ वर्ष जीने का समय दें । प्रभू की व्यवस्था, उसकी अपनी निराली व्यवस्था है । उसके समक्ष किसी का बस नहीं चलता । स्वामी अग्निवेश जी अपनी अंतिम सांस तक न्याय के लिए संवर्ध की बात करते रहे । उनका मनोबल व आत्म विश्वास अप्रतीम था । ऐसा एक भी क्षण देखने को नहीं मिला कि वह निराश है, हतप्रभ हैं । आखरी क्षण तक संवर्ध, आंदोलन और अध्यात्मिकता व न्याय के पक्ष में ही अपनी आवाज उठाने वाले एक मात्र सन्यासि स्वामी अग्निवेश जी रहे हैं । परमात्मा उनकी इच्छा अनुसार व अपने न्याय के अनुसार उन्हें अगला जन्म प्रदान करे ताकि न्याय की, वसुधैव कुटुम्बकम् की अवधारणा की उनकी मुहिम चलते रहे । आर्य समाजियों को हम सौभाग्यशाली कहें या दुर्भाग्यशाली, आर्य समाज ने विश्वस्तरीय प्रतिभाशाली व्यक्ति को खो दिया है । ऐसा व्यक्ति आर्य समाज को पुनः मिलना नामुमकिन लगता है फिर भी हमें आशा और विश्वास है भविष्य में समाज के अंतिम आदमी के पक्ष में खड़ा होने वाला व विश्व शांति के लिए वसुधैव कुटुम्बकम् को अवधारणा को पूरा करने के लिए स्वामी अग्निवेश जी जैसे व्यक्ति रखने वाला व्यक्ति पुनः इस धरती पर पुनः जन्म लें और ऋषिमुनियों की अवधारणा को और महर्षि दयानन्द की व वेद की अवधारणा को पूरा करने में सहयोगी बनें । स्वामी अग्निवेश जी से सम्बन्धित देश विदेश के प्रबुद्ध महापुरुषों के लेख व विचारों को इकट्ठाकर प्रकाशित करने का हमने विनम्र प्रयास किया है । स्वामी जी को यही हमारी श्रद्धांजलि ।

-प्रो. विठ्ठल राव आर्य

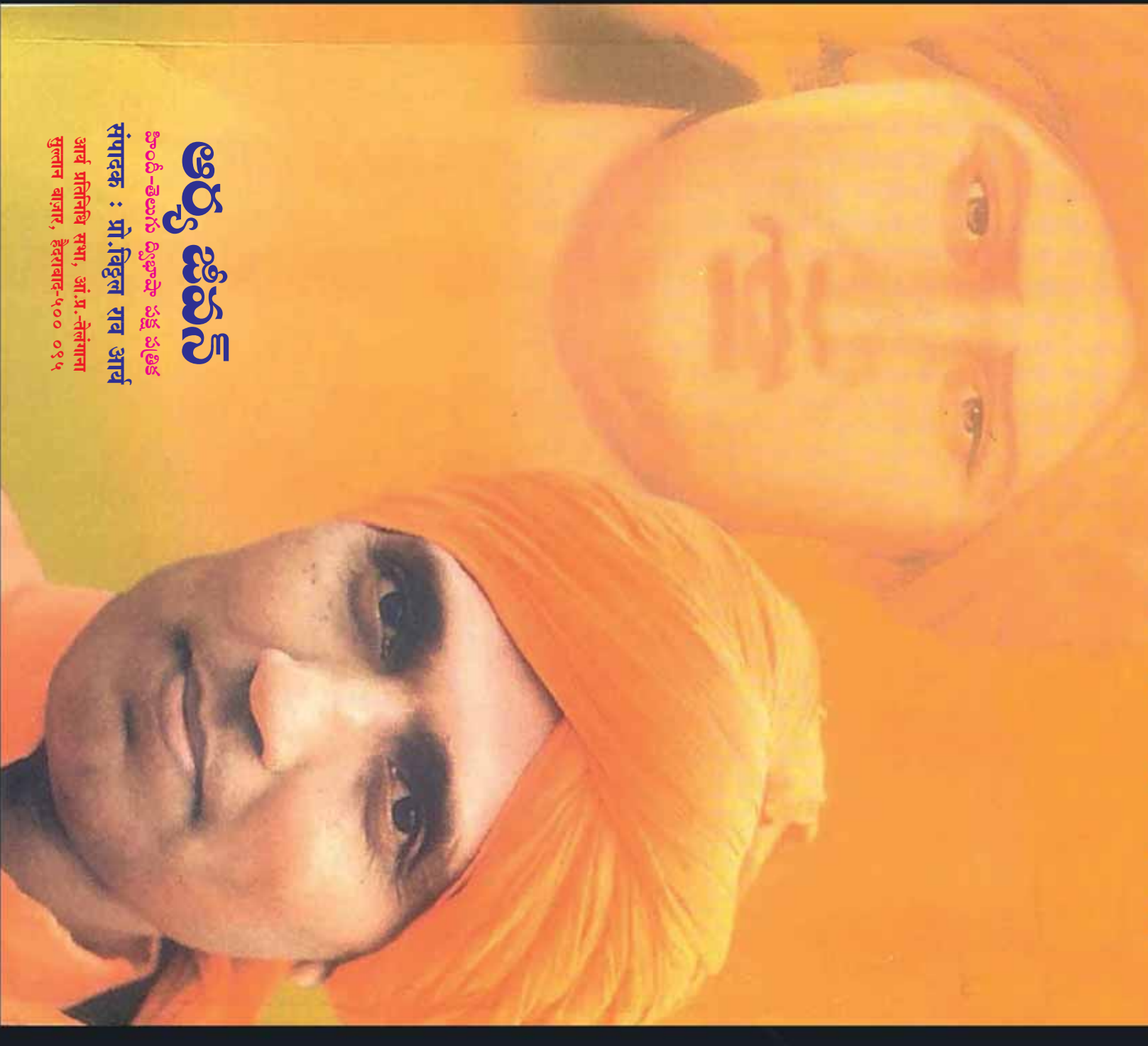
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वैदिक समाजवाद के प्रणेता स्वामी अग्निवेदेश



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సंपాదక : ప్రొ.విద్యుల రావు ఆర్య

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