

Clarion Call to the Youth to Bring About Communal Harmony

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Abstract

As the world is seeking economic prosperity, through multi-level linkages at global level, religious hegemony seems to create a divide among humanity. The need of the hour is not mere religious tolerance but a benevolent acceptance of religious difference and practices. While there a case for balancing the competing inter-religious conflicts, there is also a need to inwardly look at intra-religious practices that are subjugating the very people whom they assert to protect. Here comes the role of the youth, to bury the past differences and bridge the future relationship for a more harmonious society. This paper aims to give a calling to the youth of the world, to take the lead, in establishing a new social order of compassion and consideration and the pursuit of high ideals. The author's appeal to the youth is on similar lines of Swami Vivekananda's clarion call to Arise, Awake and stop not, till the goal is reached.

KEYWORDS: Religion, Youth, Responsibility, Harmony, Peace.

The Industrial revolution and its resultant labour exploitation gave rise to the famous call by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, "**Workers of the World, Unite !. You have nothing to lose, but your Chains !**". Today, with competing and conflicting religious hegemony, with scant concern for common good, there is a need for a different approach, to promote peace and Inter-faith Harmony. While some of our earlier efforts have been met with partial success, peace and harmony are under constant threat and danger, especially from those religious segments, wanting to prove themselves superior to others. Therefore, there is a need to change our approach. Who will bring about this change?. The efforts for change have to come, bottom -upward from the youth to grown-ups, from students to the teachers, from present generation to past generations. For long, we told the youth, what they should do?; how they should do it?... and in so telling them, we planted our historic biases, apprehensions, and mind-sets, some of which are even detriment to the society. By 2020, India is set to become the world's youngest country with 64 per cent of its population in the working age group of 15 to 34 years of age. Economically, we will have made great strides, but the lurking uncertainty is due to ethnic divergence, religious intolerance, assertion of supremacy by one faith upon other, with the ugly face of terrorism hiding its face in the veil of religious sanctions. Who else is better placed to counter this growing extremism and bring about inter-religious harmony, than the **Indian youth, known for their social quotient**, learnt through trans- generational transfers of culture, civilisation and traditions. Time is ripe for the youth of India, to respond to the clarion call of Swami Vivekananda, "**Arise, Awake, and stop not till the goal is reached**".

This pre-summit meet of Parliament of Religions, has not only invited religious leaders from different sects and faiths, but also students from technology and science, arts and commerce, Management and Law, to witness this mammoth event

and share their views. Our hopes have been rekindled. Our calculations have been proved right. Not only do the students represent this summit in large numbers, but seem ready and anxious to take a lead to bringing about communal harmony.

At the outset, I like to admit, on behalf of the present older generation, that we had allowed some elements of religion to over dominate our private and public life and are paying the price for it. We had misjudged the influence of some hardliners within our religion who dictate terms to the silent majority and we are now faced with challenges of intolerance and terrorism. We had underestimated the competitive religious practices, and are living under the constant threat of disruption and destruction by forces wanting to demonstrate their supremacy.

It is in this background, I like to narrate a story, to you, students. A young boy and his mother are on the outskirts of a village where they see a great saint with his eyes closed. The boy asks his mother who the saint is and she answers "He is the great Lord Buddha". He only speaks the truth, truth and truth ... believes in peace, peace and peace. The boy wants to prove Buddha wrong. He takes a butterfly in his palm and asks Buddha whether it is dead or alive, assuming he would crush it if Buddha says it is alive. Lord Buddha says the answer to the problem which is rattling you is in your mind is in your hand itself. In the same analogy, the challenges that the Society is now faced with, due to religious extremism, will find solutions through your hands; through the hands of the Youth.

The youth of this country are rich in ideas. You are the source of ideas. Like we say in physics, matter is never destroyed; it only changes its form. Similarly, an idea is never destroyed, it is a virus. Once an idea penetrates man, it can give way to a lot of people under the fulcrum of the idea. The higher ideas and goals are what we should aspire for. We have to revere people who are donating blood, doing environmental up gradation, participated in disaster rescue operations, helping displaced people. We should respect them, recognise them and create several action leaders at grass root levels. Ideals which one calls amity, unity, harmony, selflessness can only be achieved by upholding and rewarding those people who are involved in such work.

In the Indian social setup, especially in the family, there is a system of adjustment, accommodation. Nowadays, the main problem is that there is only thesis and antithesis but no synthesis is coming about. If we want to take forward the ideas of Swami Vivekananda, we have to come out with a new array of symbols, icons, ideas, physical events and manifestations where we do uphold and give importance to things which are consequentially very important for people in the coming days.

When a child is born, it comes with breath but without a name. When it dies, it loses its breathing but carries some name. The distance between the two events is the chemistry of human life. This chemistry teaches us how to process, how to react, how to respond. It has to be moulded to achieve those goals which all of us profess to believe and which all religions and faiths also try to disseminate.

No religion teaches anything wrong. It is the practitioners who are dominating certain religious groups and projecting a different picture. If common consensus exists in society, no outsider can possibly disturb the peace which the people have chosen to adopt.

In our homes, we always open the windows to bring in fresh air but when it comes to our minds, we block the windows and are not as open to new thoughts and ideas. The Youth are different; they are open to new ideas. Time is ripe to hand-over the reins of the future peace to you students. You are capable of taking ownership and can be trusted upon to implement it on ground, as well.

We have to not only accept these ideas but institutionalize them into a functional structural model and endeavour to manifest them in real public life to be followed and to be preached. Only then can these overweigh the other forces which threaten to disrupt our peace and harmony.

Youth have to be unstoppable. The historic over-aberrance of the yester generations, have underestimated the potential of the youth. Today, I call upon youth, to realise your full potential and move ahead. Like in the story of two brothers, where the elder one inadvertently falls inside a well; the younger one throws the bucket with a rope, hoping to pull out the elder. Not a minute was wasted in thinking about the limiting issues, but finally the younger brother pulled out the elder from the well. In the same manner, You have the potential to achieve great things. Your potent capabilities are far greater than your latent capabilities.

Thankfully, our Indian society has a linear kind of set up. Individual –Family – Caste – Community and Society, different from western countries, which are highly individual centric, Youth today should claim their rightful place, beyond their studies and job. As students, moving to our schools and colleges, we were also guardian of the local train, moving between Bilaspur and Kharagpur. The travelling public were reassured by our very presence in the train and self-defined role, to protect the train. Similarly, the youth should grab a new role, in bringing about greater understanding among religious groups.

Youth should be the bonding force, not only between religions, but also within their own religions. So many wrongs need to be righted, especially when seen from the perspective of women and children some of whom are marginalised by caste and colour. Youth should bridge the gap between the older generations and the future generations. We are not to imitate the practices in some of the western countries like Old Age homes. Ours is unique, with strong family bondage and accommodating spirit. Let us nurture our traditional family values.

Youth have to connect with the problems of the area they hail from, like health, traffic, education. Youth should engage with the people and their problems; move beyond your comfort level. Your youthful contribution during the age of 20-35 years, will be best remembered. Mankind is born free, but some are in chains; artificial chains by circumstances, lack of opportunities, for the time being. Your timely intervention can unlock these chains, and help the disadvantaged to take off in his/her life.

Youth should be questioning, probing, feeling, sharing and giving.. The journey to communal harmony and inter-faith through mutual respect, appreciation and accommodation, will set the pace for future change in the society. You should achieve the highest standards; as individuals and as a group. You are not to be guided by any politics. Only your heart and the merit, counts.

Our best wishes in all your endeavour. You are destined to succeed. The whole world will pitch-in to make it happen.

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