

A Moral Story:

A Veritable Religious Man

Adapted from the Hindi Portal Webdunia.com.

An adaptation of the story 'HIMSA PARAMO DHARMAH' by the celebrated Hindi writer, Munshi Prem Chand, originally published in 1926, is being presented. Munshi Prem Chand's writings are regarded as realistic and accurate depictions of society. The present story describes the hypocritical conduct of religious leaders who, in the name of advancing religion, delude unsuspecting masses and steer them away from the true spirit of religion. The moral of the story is that one can follow secular humanism while practicing one's own religion. - D.C.J.

Some individuals are always willing to help others. They are carefree, having no friends or foes. Jamid was one such human being. He would become a slave to anybody who spoke to him with a smile. He took great delight in helping others - without any ulterior motive.

Jamid enjoyed helping the sick and disadvantaged. He would fight for any person who was being abused or exploited. If he saw anyone carrying a heavy load, he would run to help him. He would gladly fight fires and help in emergencies. The police did not appreciate his activities. He did not care about himself and depended on others for his sustenance. Eventually, one day, some people persuaded him to wake up to reality. He left the village and ended up in a city.

The city was large - tall buildings, wide roads, expansive markets, temples and mosques. There was no mosque or temple in the village. The Muslims would gather in a small square to pray and the Hindus offered water at the roots of a tree. Jamid had great respect for religion, more than for any worldly material. Seeing the mosques and temples, he thought that the people of the city must be extremely religious and truthful, compassionate and insightful, scrupulous and virtuous. He thought that on account of these qualities, they have been so blessed by the Almighty. He showed great regard and bowed to each and every person. All were heavenly beings in his eyes.

When it was nightfall, Jamid reached a temple. It was magnificent, having marble walls and floors, and a bright gold spire (KALASH). Everything was beautiful except the courtyard where cow dung and trash was lying. Jamid looked for a broom to clean the dirt. Not finding any, he started to clean the courtyard with his towel.

Soon the devotees gathered around him. They were talking among themselves: Seems to be a Muslim, must be a sweeper, may be a spy of the other side, appears to be poor, may be he is collecting cow dung out of greed and so on and so forth.

Jamid said, "I am just a visitor. What will I do with the cow dung? I saw that this is a house of God and it should be kept clean."

An individual asked, "But you are a Muslim, right?"

Jamid replied, "God belongs to all, Hindus as well as Muslims."

"You accept our God?"

"Why not, He made us all!"

The devotees talked among themselves and decided to 'cleanse' him. People always followed him. They fed him. They taught him to sing hymns. Jamid was a good singer and enjoyed singing. Everybody believed that God had sent Jamid with a purpose.

One day, a large celebration was organized. Jamid's head was shaved. He was offered new clothes. He was given sweets to distribute. Being treated with great respect, Jamid appreciated the kindness and expressed his gratitude to all. He thought that all had shown kindness and respect to a poor man like him. They are truly religious people.

The news reached the media. Newspapers published that a Muslim scholar had been cleansed. Jamid did not understand the implications of the news. It was nothing new to him. In the village, he often participated in singing and chanting during Hindu celebrations and worships. The only difference he noticed was that in the village nobody paid any attention to him. In the city, all had become his followers.

One day, Jamid was reading a Hindu religious book along with some other devotees. He noticed that a young man, wearing sandalwood paste on his forehead and a holy thread, was beating an old man because a chicken had desecrated his home. The old man said that he always kept his chickens in cages. Somehow a chicken escaped and entered the young man's house. The old man was asking for forgiveness for letting his chicken enter the young man's house. The young man said that he would kill him. Jamid could not tolerate the young man's behavior and had a scuffle with him. Now the devotees who were at the temple joined in and badly beat up Jamid. He could not understand why the crowd beat him up. He was only trying to protect the old man. The crowd passed some remarks such as: He is a fake; it is useless to help such low class people; the basis of their religion is like this; we turned an animal into a human being but to no avail.

Jamid was lying on the street in pain. He was not sorry for the beating and pain. He wondered: Why did the same people, who had helped him, turn against him? What happened to human decency?

The next morning, Jamid met the old man whom he had tried to help. He thanked Jamid for saving his life. He said, 'The tyrants beat you badly. I escaped as soon as I had a chance. There are people eager to meet you. Yesterday, it was the time for our prayer in the mosque and so people could not come to help.'

The old man led Jamid to the residence of Kazi Jorawar Hussain. Kazi embraced Jamid and said, 'I am happy that you single-handedly dealt with the crowd of infidels. Islam needs the service of individuals like you. You only made one mistake. You should have married a Hindu damsel. Then one more person would have accepted Islam.'

Jamid started to live in a room at the residence of Kazi Jorawar Hussain and started to study the scripture from him. Many individuals would come to compliment Jamid for his courage and dedication.

One evening, as Jamid was preparing to retire, he heard the noise of a horse carriage. He thought that some friend of Kazi might have come to see him. So he went downstairs to open the door. To his surprise, he found that a woman was standing in the lobby and the carriage driver was unloading her luggage. The woman looked around and said to the carriage driver, 'It seems you have forgotten. I know for sure that this is not my house.'

The carriage driver said, 'Your relative has moved to this house. Let us go upstairs.'

The woman said, 'Let us call out to him.'

The driver said, 'We should not disturb him. He may be resting. Believe me and go upstairs.'

The woman went upstairs and the driver followed her with her luggage.

On hearing their footsteps, Kazi shut all the windows of his room, pulled out a sword and came to the door to meet the woman.

On seeing Kazi instead of her relative, the woman tried to escape but Kazi grabbed her hand and dragged her into his room. Along with the carriage driver, Jamid also entered Kazi's room. Jamid considered Kazi to be a scholar of religion and philosophy, and a just and veritable individual. So he was surprised at what he was seeing. The driver shut the door.

The woman questioned the driver indignantly, 'Why did you bring me here?'

Kazi said, 'Please be seated. You will find out very soon.'

The woman said, "You are a scholar of Islam. Is this what you have learned from God Almighty?"

Kazi retorted, "Yes, God has commanded me to convert infidels and bring them on the path of Islam. If they do not cooperate, force has to be employed."

The woman said, "What if someone disgraces your sister or daughter?"

Kazi said, "An individual's honor is restored by accepting Islam. People are being forced to convert through deception. Some give up Islam for greed. That being the case, why should we sit idle?"

The woman said, "A true follower of Hinduism does not indulge in such tactics. Maybe some undesirable elements of society who do not understand true religion perform such heinous acts."

Kazi thought for a while and then said, "Indeed, in the past if some miscreants carried out any mischief and disgraced any woman, we would try to avoid such incidents. But these days, the Muslims, being in minority, see the threat of the large majority of Hindus to their survival. Therefore, it is imperative that we adopt such practices to convert Hindus to accept Islam."

Then pointing toward Jamid, Kazi continued, "Here is a fine young man. I want you to marry him. I am confident that you will have a good, comfortable life."

The woman said, "I understand you and your religion. I do not appreciate such schemes. Please let me go, otherwise I will shout and you will be exposed."

Kazi said, "Do you want to die?"

The woman said, "I am not afraid to die. It is better than losing my honor."

Kazi said, "Why are you being bullheaded?"

The woman turned toward the door and said, "Please open the door."

Kazi grabbed the woman by her hand. Jamid said to Kazi, "Please let this woman go."

Kazi said, "Are you out of your mind?"

Kazi did not let the woman go. The carriage driver also reached for her. Jamid pushed Kazi and the driver aside and ran out of the house with the woman.

Jamid asked her, "Where is your home?"

She said, "Ahiyaganj."

Jamid called a horse carriage. As they were getting on the carriage, Kazi came out and attacked Jamid with a stick. Somehow he missed and both soon reached the woman's home. It was the residence of Pandit Raj Kumar.

Pandit Raj Kumar was anxiously awaiting her. He said, "Indira, I was late in reaching the station and so I missed you."

Indira said, "This Muslim brother has saved my honor."

Pandit Raj Kumar said, "I do not have words to express my gratitude. I see my God in you."

Jamid said, "Brother, please do not take revenge for this incident by hurting any Muslim. That will be my reward."

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