

Observations & Views:

## **The Scourge Of Fundamentalism**

Some individuals think that they are right and others are wrong. In the language of the Jain principle of multiplicity of viewpoints, this is an extreme - radically one-sided view (EKAANTAVAAD). This is fundamentalism. Such total disregard to others' viewpoint constitutes mental violence, which in some cases leads to physical violence. Fundamentalists are self-righteous. They consider their religious or political ideology to be absolute and superior. They fail to recognize that there is some good in all. This is a dangerous trend that invariably leads to immoral conduct.

President Jimmy Carter has recognized this fact and has presented his ideas in his celebrated book "Our Endangered Moral Values: America's Moral Crisis". Here are some excerpts from his interview:(1)

Why did President Carter write the book?

"It was time for someone who had some credentials on religion and politics to write a book about the devastating things that have happened in our country in the last few years."

What changes have come about in recent times?

"The thing that happened in our country in the last few years is a dramatic change between what this administration has done and what was done previously by George Bush Sr., by Ronald Reagan, by Gerald Ford, by Dwight Eisenhower, as well as Democratic presidents. There is a dramatic change in the basic structure of our policies for government in peace, in human rights, in the environment, in rich versus poor, in separation of church and state. The basic things we have followed since our country was founded have all been changed dramatically and drastically in the last few years."

Why have these dramatic changes come about?

"I think there has been an increase in the last twenty-five years, as I describe in the book, in fundamentalism, both within the religious community and also in government, and then, quite contrary to what I believe my own religion teaches and what Thomas Jefferson said, a breakdown in the wall between church and state. And it is the intrusion of these fundamentalist principles in the government. I am absolutely right and anyone who disagrees with me is absolutely wrong. Therefore, I am superior to you. If you disagree with me, there is no compromise. These kinds of things have permeated our government and they have resulted in a radical departure from the past."

Evidently, the rise of fundamentalism has contributed a great deal toward compounding the cycle of violence throughout the world.

## **Prayer In Jainism: A Rational View**

According to the fundamentals of Jainism, Jains cannot expect favors from God or from any supernatural or superhuman entity. Worshiping any demigod or goddess involves delusion that causes the influx of inauspicious karma. We Jains do not desire any miracles or wealth or comforts as a result of prayers or any other religious activity. Such designs violate the fundamental principles of Jainism. So what is the purpose of prayer in Jainism?

Essentially, we Jains perform prayers and worships that present and advance the basic principles of our religion. The Jain prayers and worships should present glimpses of reality - things as they are. They should essentially describe the seven or nine aspects of reality (TATTVAs). Such prayers and worships reinforce our concept of reality and

inspire propitious thoughts and feelings. Thus we acquire auspicious abstract karma as well as physical karma. The good thoughts and feelings comprise a wholesome mental state that results in good physical being.

A number of scientific studies have been conducted on the influence of prayer on healing, and their conclusions and premises have been reported in the media. Rob Stein has summarized the results of some investigations.(2) According to him, the results may 'depend on your point of view'. The only non-controversial conclusion is as follows: "Many studies done over the years indicate that the devout tend to be healthier. But the reasons remain far from clear. Healthy people may be more likely to join churches. The pious may lead more wholesome lifestyles. Churches, synagogues and mosques may help people take better care of themselves. The quiet meditation and incantations of praying, or the comfort of being prayed for appears to lower blood pressure, reduce stress hormones, slow the heart rate and have other potentially beneficial effects."

The above finding does not contradict the Jain tenets. However, we Jains do believe that an individual does not benefit from any religious activity performed by others. Thus on the surface, it appears that prayer or worship performed by one individual will not bring beneficial karmas to another individual. This is one aspect of the situation. However, we believe that the course of our lives depends on karmas and pseudo-karmas. The prayer or worship performed by others is an aspect of pseudo-karma. When we realize that others care about us, we have good feelings and thoughts - beneficial abstract karmas, which bring desirable consequences.

### **Charity And The Basic Principles of Jainism**

"The charity game is now in full swing as the rich, the powerful, and the famous mingle in circles where the level of opulence can seem increasingly out of place if the true goal is to help the needy," reported Brian Ross.(3)

The above statement reminds us of the 'worship' of money and materials that goes on in various religious circles. The donors are enticed to contribute in a variety of ways. Give in the present life and receive in the future lives. Give and your business will flourish. Various titles are given, names are displayed on plaques and parades are held to honor the donors.

Jainism is a unique religion. We Jains are expected to practice the teachings of our religion individually and as a society. Shouldn't we give just to help the needy? Shouldn't we give just because our institutions need our support? Do we have to indulge in different charades in the name of charity? By blindly following the traditions, we violate the spirit of our pristine religion.(4)

### **Two Views Of Call Centers In India:**

Multiplicity Of Viewpoints (ANEKAANTAVAAD) In Action(5)

In his novel, 'One Night @ the Call Center', Chetan Bhagat has presented the two sides of outsourcing of jobs to India. Some 700,000 Indians work in the "business processing" industry, which contributes to an estimated \$17 billion to the Indian economy. The individuals in these enterprises enjoy an affluent lifestyle. However, it comes with 'Westernization' being implanted in Indian culture - odd working hours, neglect of their family obligations, drinking and dating with a casualness that may cause deep concerns to their parents.

In addition to these, Chetan Bhagat brings out a more serious issue. He writes, "Look at our country - we are still so behind these Americans. Even when we know we are no

less than them. ... We should be building roads, power plants, airports, phone networks and metro trains. ... And if the government ... does that, the young people in this country will find [real] jobs.” He continues, “... an entire generation up all night [in call centers], providing crutches for the white morons to run their lives ... while bad bosses and ... Americans suck the lifeblood out of our country’s most productive generation.”

Footnotes:

1. Tonight Show, November 21, 2005.
2. washingtonpost.com, 3/24/2006.
3. Brian Ross, ABC News Chief Investigative Correspondent, on the program Prime Time, December 8, 2005.
4. For details, please see ‘Charity: A Jain Scriptural View’ by Dr. Trilok Chandra Jain Shastri, Studies In Jainism: Reader 2, pages 127-131.
5. Based on ‘The Shashi Tharoor Column’, published in the magazine section of The Hindu of February 26, 2006.