

SHRI VIRCHAND GANDHI'S SPEECH AT THE WORLD CONGRESS OF RELIGIONS HELD IN CHICAGO, 1893

Mr. President, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I will not trouble you with a long speech. I, like my respected friends, Mr. Muzumdar and others, come from India, the mother of religions. I represent Jainism, a faith older than Buddhism, similar to it in its ethics, but different from it in its psychology, and professed by a million and a half of India's most peaceful and law-abiding citizens. You have heard so many speeches from eloquent members, and I shall speak later on at some length. I will, at present, only offer on behalf of my community and their high priest, Muni Atmaramji, whom I especially represent here, our sincere thanks for the kind welcome you have given us. This spectacle of the learned leaders of thought and religion meeting together on a common platform, and throwing light on religious problems, has been the dream of Atmaramji's life. He has commissioned me to say to you that he offers his most cordial congratulations on his own behalf, and on behalf of the Jaina community, for your having achieved the consummation of that grand idea, of convening a Parliament of Religions.

I wish that the duty of addressing you on the history and the tenets of the Jaina faith had fallen on *that* able person than on me. The inclemency of the climate, and the distant voyage which one has

to undertake before one can come here, have prevented that able Jaina from attending this grand assembly and personally presenting to you the religious convictions of the Jainas. You will, therefore, look upon me as simply the mouthpiece of Muni Atmaramji, the learned high priest of the Jainas in India, who has devoted his whole life to the study of that ancient faith. I am truly sorry that Muni Atmaramji is not among us to take charge of the duty of addressing you.

1. Jainism has two ways of looking at things—one called the Dravyārthikanaya and the other the Paryāyārthikanaya. I shall illustrate the same. The production of a law is the production of something not previously existing, if we think of it from the latter point of view, i.e., as a Paryāya or modification; while it is not the production of something not previously existing, if we look at it from the former point of view, i.e., as a Dravya or substance. According to the Dravyārthikanaya view the universe is without beginning and without end, but according to the Paryāyārthikanaya view we have creation and destruction at every moment.

The Jaina canon may be divided into two parts: first, Śruta Dharma, i.e., philosophy, and second, Caritra Dharma, i.e., ethics.

The Śruta Dharma inquires into the nature of nine principles, six kinds of living beings and four states of existence—sentient beings, non-sentient things, merit, demerit. Of the nine principles, the first is 'soul'. According to the Jaina view 'soul'

is that element which knows, thinks and feels. It is in fact the divine element in the living being. The Jaina thinks that the phenomena of knowledge, feeling, thinking and willing are conditioned on something, and that that something must be as real as anything can be. This 'soul' is in a certain sense different from knowledge and in another sense identical with it. So far as one's knowledge is concerned the soul is identical with it, but so far as some one else's knowledge is concerned it is different from it. The true nature of the soul is right knowledge, right faith and right conduct. The soul, so long as it is subject to transmigration, is undergoing evolution and involution.

The second principle is non-soul. It is not simply what we understand by matter, but is more than that. Matter is a term contrary to 'soul'. But non-soul is its contradictory. Whatever is not soul is non-soul.

The rest of the nine principles are but the different states produced by the combination and separation of soul and non-soul. The third principle is merit: that on account of which a being is happy. The fourth principle is demerit: that on account of which a being suffers from misery. The fifth is the state which brings in merit and demerit. The sixth is Samvara: that which stops the inflow of foreign energies. The seventh is destruction of actions. The eighth is bondage of soul, with actions. The ninth is total and permanent freedom of soul from all actions.

Division of Substance: Substance is divided into

the sentient, or conscious, matter, Dharmāstikāya (fulcrum of motion), Adharmāstikāya (fulcrum of stability or rest), stability, space and time. Six kinds of living beings are divided into six classes, earth body beings, water body beings, fire body beings, wind body beings, vegetables, and all of them having one organ of sense, that of touch. These are again divided into four classes of beings: beings having two organs of sense, those of touch and of taste, such as tapeworms, leeches, etc.; beings having three organs of sense, those of taste, touch and smell, such as ants, lice, etc.; beings having four organs of sense, those of touch, taste, smell and sight, such as bees, scorpions, etc.; beings having five organs of sense, those of touch, taste, smell, sight and hearing. These last are human beings, animals, birds, men and gods. All these living beings have four, five or six of the following capacities: capacity of taking food, capacity of constructing body, capacity of constructing organs, capacity of respiration, capacity of speaking and capacity of thinking. Beings having one organ of sense, that is, of touch, have the first five capacities, while those having five organs have all the six capacities.

The Jaina canonical book treats very elaborately of the minute divisions of the living beings, and their prophets have long before the discovery of the microscope been able to tell how many organs of sense the minutest animalcule has. I would refer those who are desirous of studying Jaina biology, zoology, botany, anatomy and philosophy to the many books published by our society.

I shall now refer to the four states of existence. They are naraka, tiryac, manuṣya and deva. Naraka is the lowest state of existence, that of being a denizen of hell ; tiryac is the next, that of having an earth body, water body, fire body, wind body, vegetable, of having two, three or four organs, animals and birds. The third is manuṣya, of being a man; and the fourth is deva, that of being a denizen of the celestial world. The highest state of existence is the Jaina Mokṣa, the apotheosis in the sense that the mortal being by the destruction of all Karma attains the highest spiritualism, and the soul being severed from all connection with matter regains its purest state and becomes divine.

Having briefly stated the principal articles of Jaina belief, I come to the grand questions the answers to which are the objects of all religious inquiry and the substance of all creeds.

What is the origin of the universe ?

This involves the question of God. Gautama, the Buddha, forbids inquiry into the beginning of things. In the Brahmanical literature bearing on the constitution of cosmos frequent reference is made to the days and nights of Brahmā, the periods of Manvantara and the periods of Pralaya. But the Jainas, leaving all symbolical expressions aside, distinctly reaffirm the view previously promulgated by the previous hierophants, that matter and soul are eternal and cannot be created. You can affirm existence of a thing from one point of view, deny it from another and affirm both existence and non-existence with reference to it at different times. If you should

think of affirming both existence and non-existence at the same time from the same point of view, you must say that the thing cannot be spoken of. Under certain circumstances, the affirmation of existence is not possible ; similarly, of non-existence and also of both.

What is meant by these seven modes is that a thing should not be considered as existing everywhere at all times, in all ways, and in the form of everything. It may exist in one place and not in another at one time. It is not meant by these modes that there is no certainty, or that we have to deal with probabilities only as some scholars have taught. Even the great Vedāntist Śaṅkarācārya has possibly erred when he says that the Jainas are agnostics. All that is implied is that every assertion which is true is true only under certain conditions of substance, space, time, etc.

This is the great merit of the Jaina philosophy, that while other philosophies make absolute assertions, the Jaina looks at things *from all standpoints*, and adapts itself like a mighty ocean in which the sectarian rivers merge themselves. What is God, then ? God, in the sense of an extra cosmic personal creator, has no place in the Jaina philosophy. It distinctly denies such creator as illogical and irrelevant in the general scheme of the universe. But it lays down that there is a subtle essence underlying all substances, conscious as well as unconscious, which becomes an eternal cause of all modifications, and is termed God.

The doctrine of the transmigration of soul, or

the reincarnation, is another grand idea of the Jaina philosophy. The companion doctrine of transmigration is the doctrine of Karma.

The Sanskrit of the word Karma means action. "With what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again" and "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap" are but the corollaries of that most intricate law of Karma. It solves the problem of the inequality and apparent injustice of the world.

The Karma in the Jaina philosophy is divided into eight classes: Those which act as an impediment to the knowledge of truth; those which act as an impediment to the right insight of various sorts; those which give one pleasure or pain, and those which produce bewilderment. The other four are again divided into other classes, so minutely that a student of Jaina Karma philosophy can trace any effect to a particular Karma. No other Indian philosophy reads so beautifully and so clearly the doctrine of Karma. Persons who, by right faith, right knowledge and right conduct, destroy all Karma and thus fully develop the nature of their soul, reach the highest perfection; become divine and are called Jinas. Those Jinas who, in every age, preach the law and establish the order, are called Tirthankaras.

2. I now come to the Jaina ethics, which direct conduct to be so adapted as to insure the fullest development of the soul—the highest happiness, that is the goal of human conduct, which is the ultimate

end of human action. Jainism teaches to look upon all living beings as upon oneself. What then is the mode of attaining the highest happiness ? The sacred books of the Brâhmanas prescribe devotion and Karma. The Vedânta indicates the path of knowledge as the means to the highest. But Jainism goes a step farther and says that the highest happiness is to be obtained by knowledge and religious observances. The five Mahāvratas or great commandments for Jaina ascetics are :

Not to kill, i.e., to protect all life ; not to lie ; not to take that which is not given ; to abstain from sexual intercourse ; to renounce all interest in worldly things, especially to call nothing one's own.

Classes in Jaina Philosophy

Once the whole civilized world embraced this doctrine. Many philosophers have upheld it. Scientists like Flammarion, Figuier and Brewster have advocated it. Theologians like Müller, Dorner and Edward Beecher have maintained it. The Bible and sacred literature of the east are full of it, and it is today accepted by the majority of the world's inhabitants.

People are talking of design in nature. But what does the idea of design lead to ? Design means contrivance, adaptation of means to an end. But the necessity of contrivance, the need of employing means, is a consequence of the limitation of power. Who would have recourse to means if to attain his end his mere word was sufficient ?

But how shall we reconcile God's infinite benevolence and justice with his infinite power, when we look around and see that some of his creatures are born happy and others miserable? Why is he so partial? Where is the moral responsibility of a person having no incentive to lead a virtuous life? The problem of injustice and misery which broods over our world can only be explained by the doctrine of reincarnation and Karma, to which I am presently coming.

That the soul is immortal is doubted by very few. It is an old declaration that whatsoever begins in time must end in time. You cannot say that the soul is eternal on one side of its earthly period without being so in the other. If the soul sprang into existence specially for this life, why should it continue afterwards? The ordinary idea of creation at birth involves the correlative of annihilation at death. Moreover, it does not stand to reason that from an infinite history the soul enters this world for its first and all physical existence, and then merges into an endless spiritual eternity. The more reasonable education is that it has passed through many lives and will have to pass through many more before it reaches its ultimate goal. But it is directed that we have no memory of past lives. Can anyone recall his childhood? Has anyone a memory of that wonderful epoch—infancy?

Answers to the Critics of Hinduism

In Sunday night's session Rev. George F. Pente-

cost of London, speaking on "The Present Outlook of Religions", cast reflections upon the chastity of the women who serve in the temples of India. It is said that if he had followed his manuscript he would not have made the most pointed of these statements, but he digressed somewhat from what he had written. As a result, Mr. Gandhi considered it necessary to reply to this attack as follows :

"Before proceeding with my address, I wish to make a few observations. This platform is not a place for mutual recriminations, and I am heartily sorry that from time to time a most un-Christian spirit is allowed free scope here, but I know how to take these recriminations at their proper value. I am glad that no one has dared to attack the religion I represent. It is well that they should not. But every attack has been directed to the abuses existing in our society. And I repeat now what I repeat every day, that these abuses are not from religion, but in spite of religion, as in every other country.

"Some men in their ambition think that they are Pauls, and what they think they believe. These new Pauls go to vent their platitudes upon India. They go to India to convert the heathens in a mass, but when they find their dreams melting away, as dreams always do, they return to pass a whole life in abusing the Hindu. Abuses are not arguments against any religion, nor self-adulation the proof of the truth of one's own. For such I have greatest pity. There are a few Hindu temples in Southern India where women-singers are employed to sing on

certain occasions. Some of them are of dubious character, and the Hindu society feels it and is trying its best to remove the evil, but to call these "priestesses because they are prostitutes" and "prostitutes because they are priestesses" is a statement which differs as much from truth as darkness from light. These women are never allowed to enter the main body of the temple, and as for their being priestesses, there is not one woman priestess from the Himalayas to Cape Comorin.

"If the present abuses in India have been produced by the Hindu religion, the same religion had the strength of producing a society which made the Greek historian say : 'No Hindu was ever known to tell an untruth, no Hindu woman ever known to be unchaste.' And even in the present day where is there a more chaste woman or a milder man than in India ? The Oriental bubbles may be pricked, but the very hysterical shrieks sent forth from this platform from time to time show to the world that sometimes bubbles may be heavier than the blated balloons of vanity and self-conceit.

"I am very, very sorry for those who criticize the great ones of India, and my only consolation is that all their information about them has come from third-hand, fourth-hand sources, percolating through layers of superstition and bigotry. To those who think that in the refusal of the Hindu to criticize the character of Jesus is a tacit acceptance of the superiority of the fanatical *nil admirari* cult they represent, I am tempted to quote the old fable of Æsop, and tell them: 'Not to you I bend the knee,

but to the image you are carrying on your back,' and point out to them one page from the life of the great Emperor Akbar.

"A certain ship full of Mohammedan pilgrims was going to Mecca. On its way a Portuguese vessel captured it. Amongst the booty were some copies of the Koran. The Portuguese hanged these copies of the Koran (Kuran) around the necks of dogs, and paraded these dogs through the streets of Ormuz. It happened that this very Portuguese ship was captured by the emperor's men, and in it were found copies of the Bible. The love of Akbar for his mother is well-known—and his mother was a zealous Mohammedan, and it pained her very much to hear the treatment of the sacred book of the Mohammedans in the hands of the Christians, and she wanted Akbar to do the same with the Bible. But this great man replied: 'Mother, these ignorant men do not know the value of the Koran, and they treated it in a manner which is the outcome of ignorance. But I know the glory of the Koran and the Bible both, and I cannot degenerate myself in the way they did.'"

Mr. Virchand Gandhi was then presented by Dr. Barrows as one whom he had come to esteem greatly as a guest in his own household. Mr. Gandhi was greeted with much applause as he came forward to speak. He said:

Are we not all sorry that we are parting so soon? Do we not wish that this Parliament would

last seventeen times seventeen days ? Have we not heard with pleasure and interest the speeches of the learned representatives on this platform ? Do we not see that the sublime dream of the organizers of this unique Parliament has been more than realized ? If you will only permit a heathen to deliver his message of peace and love, I shall only ask you to look at the multifarious ideas presented to you in a liberal spirit, and not with superstition and bigotry, as the seven blind men did in the elephant story.

Once upon a time in a great city an elephant was brought with a circus. The people had never seen an elephant before. There were seven blind men in the city who longed to know what kind of an animal it was, so they went together to the place where the elephant was kept. One of them placed his hands on the ears, another on the legs, a third one on the tail of the elephant, and so on. When they were asked by the people what kind of an animal the elephant was, one of the blind men said, "Oh, to be sure, the elephant is like a big winnowing fan." Another blind man said, "No, my dear sir, you are wrong. The elephant is more like a big, round post." The third, "You are quite mistaken ; it is like a tapering stick." The rest of them gave also their different opinions. The proprietor of the circus stepped forward and said : "My friends, you are all mistaken. You have not examined the elephant from all sides. Had you done so you would not have taken one-sided views."

Brothers and sisters, I entreat you to hear the moral of this story and learn to examine the various

religious systems from all standpoints.

I now thank you from the bottom of my heart for the kindness with which you have received us and for the liberal spirit and patience with which you have heard us. And to you, Rev. Dr. Barrows and President Bonney, we owe the deepest gratitude for the hospitality which you have extended to us.