



“I am a Hindu, I am a Muslim I am a Christian”

Shree Shree Ma Anandamayee

Ma Anandamayee (1896-1987) was accepted and revered as one of the prominent Hindu woman saints in the world in the last century. Definition of saint varies in accordance with different religious faiths .But a saint commands respect and reverence from people irrespective of their religious adherence because of the indiscriminating and intrinsic love he emanates for every sentient being. The inner truth of religion (the underlying principle hidden in the detailed scriptural injunctions) is brought to the light and understanding of common men through the life, activities and sayings of a saint belonging to that particular religion.

A seeker attains sainthood, having lived through years and decades of laborious spiritual disciplines as prescribed by the religion. Through his steadfast adherence to the respective faith, and through sincerity and an honest approach to rediscover the truth, he goes through the transformation of his life, gets enlightened and is finally able to see the inner light of the truth of life. Moved by love for the common men he tries to interpret the truth he experienced lucidly and logically for his fellow-men. He thereby inspires mankind to take to the religious path to taste the nectar of truth, thus making life less painful and miserable.

It is impracticable, rather impossible for a common man to tread the same path as trod by a saint. One can follow his teachings and sayings only. A saint speaks in the language of the common man, but at times one has to fathom the inner meaning of his sayings which go beyond the literal import, and is unreachable by common intelligence. To reach the inner truth of a saint’s words one needs to go deeper using his contemplative faculty and with utmost earnestness. Sometimes a saint coins a word which is aphoristic in nature

A saint is not a founder of a religion but he is an honest and living representation of the religion he followed throughout his life. Criticism, trial and even the fear of death cannot deter him from speaking out strongly and distinctly in declaring the truth he experienced. The recorded history of religions of the world stands witness to that fact.

The above saying of Shree Shree Ma Anandamayee is one such bold statement which so far is unheard of from any platform, both of past and contemporary world religions.

Seekers from all over the world following various religious faiths came to Ma during her physical existence for spiritual guidance. Although she was not averse to switching from one religion to another she never encouraged this trend. She would always ask a person to stay with the religion he inherited or had once embraced. In

this context we should note another saying of hers. She said, “All the religions are of one trend, all the trends are one, all of us are one.” On the surface this statement speaks of her liberal and reconciliatory views about all the religions. It goes well with this present saying under consideration.

Before analysing her saying we need to know the context in which she uttered this.

Once a Western woman came and asked Ma for spiritual guidance. In an answer to Ma’s query about her faith the lady said that she was a Christian. Instantly it came out from the lips of Ma, “I am a Hindu, I am a Muslim, I am a Christian.”

A great Indian saint of the nineteenth century, Thakur Shree Ramakrishna Paramahansadevji, after practicing several different paths and different religions, declared the one inner harmony between all the religions. His declaration on Sarva Dharma Samanvaya (synthesis of all religions) was an epoch-making event in Indian religious history.

One may be tempted to find an echo of Thakur Ramakrishnadev’s synthesis in Ma’s statement, but unlike Thakur she never identified herself as an adherent to another religious belief except in this statement. Besides, she never performed conventional sadhana to achieve any religious goal.

A critical analysis of Ma’s statement.

Here Ma’s use of the present tense implies simultaneous adherence to three major contemporary religions of the world. This clearly precludes her from any particular religion. Sequential transformation of religious identity is permissible. It is practicable as well. But if a Christian declares that he is a Hindu or a Muslim; this will be taken as irreverence to Christianity. Not only that, neither the Hindus nor the Muslims will take him into their respective brotherhood unless he goes through the rites as prescribed in the scriptures. If a Muslim declares that he is Hindu or a Christian; he will immediately be called a Kafir (an infidel in Islam) and an injunction will be issued against him by the clerics or the guardians of Islam to annihilate him. Likewise if a Hindu, especially a known spiritual personality, openly declares his religious identity as a Christian or a Muslim he will be termed an atheist and will be declared as an outcast from his religion. No religious ethics permit such a statement.

Once during her childhood some Christian missionaries came to her village in remote rural Bengal, India to spread the biblical message. As an innocent child she accompanied them moving around the village.

In the Royal Garden called Shah Bagh in Dhaka Ma was living with her husband (who was a caretaker of the garden) as a housewife. Her spiritual unfolding was in its initial state. A Majhar(a Muslim tomb) of an Arabian saint was there near her living quarters. In a state of trance she offered namaj (a Muslim prayer) before the tomb in Arabic, a language quite unknown to her.

Except in these two instances in her life there were no deviations from orthodox Hindu ways, although she never demonstrated any antipathy in her words and actions towards other religions and their adherents. Saints, Guardians, clerics and followers of

different sects and religions came to Ma during her mortal existence to have a touch of her unqualified love and compassion without any discrimination.

This statement of Ma was not made in camera. This was published in the books widely circulated amongst her followers and others all over the world. Astonishingly, not a single word of protest surfaced from any corner of the world's religious communities in general, or from any section of the orthodox Hindu fraternity in particular. The reason could be two fold. First perhaps no one paid any heed to this important declaration, and secondly people might have overlooked or ignored the inner meaning of it. In this context it should also be remembered that the ascetics, in the ashrams established in the name of Ma Anandamayee spread over different parts of India and abroad are asked to follow strictly the orthodox Hindu way of living. Ma's religious identity had never been questioned in any corner of the world.

It should be remembered that the common man very often makes a statement of convenience to suit the immediate circumstances, and may make changes or amendments to it in another context. But whenever, wherever and whatever a saint says, it is a product of his conviction and commitment towards the religion he belonged to. His words are like a scriptural injunction that may not be changed.

From the recorded history of religions all over the world one can find that religious activism, fundamentalism and conservatism gave birth to intra- and inter-religious conflicts resulting in wars and bloodshed. The present world is no exception to this deplorable situation. Instead of guiding the followers to a quiet life of amity and peace, it makes the lives of innocent masses fearful and miserable. The guardians' of religions who are supposed to deliver truth to the world, miss their way and are trapped in conflict along with their followers.

Naturally a question may crop up in an intelligent mind about the view of life from where Ma made such an unconventional utterance. It could neither be from any religious base nor could it be taken as a slogan for secularisation. Surely this is a statement of absolute freedom from any religious barriers, pointing to the basic vision of all religious preaching and teaching. It is an utterance of non-discriminating and unqualified love for all creation, which is the mother of all religions.

In contemporary religious circles of the world the Hindus are very often termed or criticized as idol worshippers. One cannot think of a non-Christian symbol, like an image of any Hindu god and goddess on a Christian altar.

Idols are nothing but a perceptible object to manifest the love within everybody. Love for an Icon and an idol is no different.

In the Roman Catholic Christian world the Holy cross as well as the Madonna command reverence as the latter has its profoundly honoured place on the altar. A critical sceptic may have a reservation to accept this icon on the Christian altar as he will consider it a non-Christian symbol. None of the two human figures (Mother Mary with child Jesus) are Christian as Christianity came into existence when Jesus was almost thirty years old. When Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist, it was surely not into Christianity. And mother Mary became Christian only after Christianity came into existence almost three decades after the birth of Jesus. Theology might have a logical explanation to reconcile this for this apparent anomaly, but for a lay mind it

will still remain as a puzzle. Arguments and counter arguments may continue for aeons. But the plain, simple and easily understood explanation is that for the Madonna the underlying principle is the love which transcends orthodoxy and any religious barriers. The manifestation of mother's love is what the Madonna stands for.

To come back to Ma's statement under consideration it could be said that none but a mother can make such a bold statement. We should bear in mind that all religions evolved out of love for mankind but love has no religion.

Suppose a Hindu mother has three children. Each of them embraced a separate religious faith with her consent. Should the love of the mother differ according to their belief?

Let us take another practical instance. A young Christian lady with a child after the demise of her husband got converted to Islam and was married to a Muslim. She gave birth to another child from her Muslim husband. Should her past and present religious faith stand in the way of love towards her two children? There is nothing like Hindu-love, Christian-love and Islamic-love. Love is the *aqua regia* of life which dissolves everything including religions.

A liberal Hindu ascetic may not disregard Christianity or Islam and has reverence for the other faiths. But the holy Bible or the holy cross and the holy Koran will not have any place on his altar of worship. Similarly will be the case with a liberal Muslim or a Christian. No Hindu scriptural books or the images of the scores of Gods will have any place on the altar in a Christian church or in the Masjid (place of prayer of the Muslim). Religious ethics demands of a true adherent, not to utter or do anything which may show irreverence to the faith to which he belongs.

As stated above that this utterance of Ma is not made from any religious platform; to be precise, at that very moment Ma represented Motherhood for all creation. True motherhood is sustained in love only. Non-discriminating love is another name of motherhood.

For the time being physical and genetic aspects of motherhood (mother's love) and its manifestations are not considered separately.

One loves to live and lives to love and be loved. In other words, every sentient being sustains itself in love only. In love the subject-object relationship is obvious, and that relationship is very subjective.