

THE CHOICE TODAY

Those who believe in God as Creator of the Universe would also concede that He created it out of Love. And those who believe God as All-pervading and Omnipresent, must also agree that the Creator did so because He could not resist its fascination. Rather He chose to be associated with every movement, change and transformation that would take place in any object – animate or inanimate. God simply loved it.

Don't we ourselves find the universe wonderful, charming and fascinating? We know the Sun and that it is stationary. The earth goes dancing around it, creating for us the day and the night, the seasons and the weathers. The air, the water and other objects on our earth bathe in the light and the warmth of the Sun and experience the mirth of moving, growing and changing; budding, blooming and bearing fruits. Then, we see the moon, we see the stars, all having their own soothing glittering lights. We also feel excited to see the mountains on the one hand and the oceans on the other. And they love each other, they inter-act, without budging an inch from their respective places. Then we have waterfalls, caves, forests, rivers, plains, deserts and so on, all having their own attraction, fascination and the beauty.

Coming to the human beings, God seems to have been extra kind in their case. He bestowed mankind with the Mind to think, Intellect to analyse and Wisdom to decide, along with sense organs to see, hear, taste, feel and smell. In fact God created man in His own image and endowed him with faculties to appreciate and be fascinated by Nature, the divine creation. No wonder, our best poets, painters and other creative artists took inspiration from Nature and sought to interpret it for us, to depict its message that may be of use to us.

As per the divine scheme of things, Nature in general and this planet of ours in particular provides man with not only food for thought, but food for stomach also. Starting from leaves and fruits to vegetables and cereals, all are the bounties of Nature. Even the oxygen for life-breath comes from Nature outside.

So, man must be able appreciate the chord of love, peace and harmony that exists between one object of Nature and the other, take inspiration and manifest the same in his outlook and behaviour towards Nature as also the fellow beings. God has already blessed him with what he needed to do so.

Diversity

Before we proceed further, let us note that one of the most prominent factors that go to make this earth and the universe around, so beautiful, charming and attractive is the phenomenon of diversity. Mountains, rivers, forests, deserts and the oceans, the animals, birds and insects, look quite different from one another, each category further having sub-categories. Even there we may find the same

object having different forms, sizes and stages, etc. For example, a forest may have several categories of trees and plants with different roots, trunks, leaves and fruits. Even further, trees of the same category may be small or big, with fruits or without them we look at and that is what we call beauty. And one object looks all the more beautiful when seen after the other, particularly of contrasting appearance.

That all this is 'beauty' will be realised and appreciated further if you just imagine the other probability. Supposing the forest had the same category of trees, having the same height and showing no sign of transformation or growth, would it not be dull, without any attraction, without any fascination? Similarly, monotony or uniformity in other facets of Nature would have rendered this earth, this world a boring place. But thank God, no such thing did happen and this planet has continued to interest man since beginning till today.

This phenomenon of diversity, in fact, does not prevail only in the inanimate objects of Nature or animals, birds and insects, but stands amply extended to mankind also. No doubt God created us all from the same five elements—the earth, the water, the fire, the air and the ether, and adorned each and every human frame with two eyes, two ears, one nose, two arms, two legs, as also one heart, two lungs, one brain and so on. Yet we differ in colour, height, etc. The language, dress and diet are other dimensions of this inherent diversity. Naturally, this renders the human race charming and beautiful. Even a dark complexioned person may look charming if majority of those surrounding him or her happen to be of what we call fair complexion. Moreover, imagine the situation where all eyes were blue and the hair grey, where all men and women were of the same size, same height. Could you call it really fascinating?

Human Effort

The present civilisation, with all its diversities, spread over different parts of the world must be grateful to their ancestors, their past generations for making life as comfortable and this earth as loveable and liveable as it is today. Surely, it has taken centuries, generation after generation, to reach where we stand. Many of our predecessors worked ceaselessly, sacrificed their own comforts so that the succeeding generations found life more comfortable, rich and prosperous. They made one discovery after the other, made one invention after the other. The result is that the world has become so small today that you can go round it in a matter of hours. The means of transportation supplemented by those of communication have brought man so close to man that one can know within minutes what takes place in any part of the globe. Some of the nations are so advanced and affluent that the people have only to know how to operate the latest gadgets; every luxury of life seems to be at their disposal. The nations, who do not or cannot produce an article, they can very well import the same from others, if they so desire.

Thanks to the development in the fields of health, education and social welfare, the average life-expectancy has found tremendous increase in almost all the parts

of the world. In a still developing country like India, it has gone up from 32 years in 1941 to 59 years in 1991 and is expected to touch 65 years by the turn of the century. The achievements in the fields of agriculture and industrial production have been equally marvellous. Thanks to the development of new technologies, implements and inputs, we have experience 'revolutions' in these fields. On the whole, the inhabitants of the world at present are much more comfortable, have many advantages as compared to their predecessors. We are indeed indebted to the scientists, technologists, scholars and statesmen who, from time to time, endeavoured for common good and brought human civilisation to its prevailing standards.

Negative Forces

Not that all that happened in the past was always positive, right and constructive. Truth was resisted and twisted, unity broken and property destroyed by all kinds of negative forces from time to time. Lord Rama and Lord Krishna, the incarnation of God on earth, had to face Ravana and Kansa and their tribes opposed to truth, love and justice. Then we saw plunderers like Alexander Mohammed Ghauri, Mehmood Ghazanavi, and more recently, Napoleon and Hitler. Innocent people were killed and property destroyed at such a large scale that the earth appeared to be defaced by them and their men. According to one estimate, more than 50 million people lost their lives in the Second World War alone, the atom bomb attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in Japan remaining the worst tragedies of human behaviour. Had such negative forces not been there in the past, the land-scape or complexion of the earth would have been quite different. In place of war memorials, we should have inherited research institutes or recreation centres. The material that was used to build one Chinese Wall would have created thousands of dwelling units for peaceful citizens. We must, therefore, be grateful to those who continued to make improvements from one civilisation to another with laudable contribution by way of thought and action, in spite of the negative forces working in full swing. Certainly, they survived the onslaught of these negative forces, withstood the storms and made sacrifices only to see that we inherit a world better than what they themselves found it.

Situation Today

Viewed from this angle, the situation today too does not happen to be quite different. Man does not seem to have learnt the lesson from the past. A lot is being done in the fields of science and technology and efforts are on to make life more and more comfortable, affluent and prosperous. But the negative forces too are working with corresponding and equal velocity, with the result that humanity faces a threat to its existence which is more serious than ever in the past.

The First World War led to the formulation of the League of Nations. It appeared that a generation which was called upon to pay a heavy price in blood, toil and tears was in no mood to see that its succeeding generations perished in another bloody war. But the powerful nations were soon overwhelmed by their narrow

selfishness and appeasement of fascism brought about the Second World War, which proved bloodier and caused more toil and tears.

The world nations once again realised the need for freedom from fear and want and resolved to have the United Nations Organisation. They pledged to save the succeeding generations from the scourge of war; and expressed their faith in fundamental human right, worth and dignity, social progress, better standards of life, tolerance, peace and good neighborliness. They also committed themselves to maintain international peace and security and 'use armed forces only in common interest.'

The United Nations Charter was, thus, a big step forward towards world peace and prosperity of nations based on the principles of equality and justice for every human being without any distinction of race, sex, language, religion etc. The creation of specialised agencies like UNESCO, WHO, ILO as well as the IMF, World Bank and IDA, came as a big relief to the agony-stricken mankind. The experience, however, revealed that the big Power Blocs were still vying for their supremacy over the world nations, particularly the small and the underdeveloped. The definition of 'International Peace', thus could not go beyond the sense of 'Cold War' and 'Security' turned out to be a major consumer of resources of the world so scarce and so valuable.

No doubt, we have been led fast into the age of computer and the satellite and helped to make life more efficient and comfortable. More and more gadgets are entering our kitchens, drawing rooms and bedrooms. Yet the fact remains that the peace and prosperity visualised in the UN Charter are still to be realised. The newly independent countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America, who needed support from the world community for development, are still underdeveloped. There is still a yawning gap between the developed and the underdeveloped nations. Within nations, the gap between the rich and the poor too has not narrowed. Regional conflicts and wars have endangered peace in different parts of the world. Technological advancement in the developed countries has exposed the third world to new dangers of economic and cultural domination. The emergence of new power centres in Europe, Japan and elsewhere and the disintegration of the Soviet Union have made the world multi-polar but the majority of the non-aligned and developing nations feel ignored.

Moreover, there have been many occasions when the UN had to deploy armed forces 'in common interest'. The scale of such deployment has been quite large in many regions but peace has been eluding all the time. The world body, rather community, is failing to do much to end the civil and ethnic wars, in a number of countries. Amongst nations, there have been instances where friendship ended in treachery and led to wars. And whenever the old frontiers were violated and new borders created, millions had to migrate from one side to the other facing all kinds of pain, suffering and sorrow. There was bloodshed, their was loss of property. The most unfortunate feature is that even today secessionism is causing such

bloodshed and suffering and world community is failing to do much. The trend is rather increasing and nobody knows which nation may become the target next.

Arms Race

The arms race in general and nuclear proliferation in particular has also continued. No doubt the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty has come into force, a firm commitment to destroy the existing nuclear arsenals under a definite time frame is yet to come from the nuclear nations. Apparently these nuclear nations would like to retain their arsenals so that they feel 'safe' and can dictate to others. Naturally, the smaller nations would also like to be 'security conscious' and acquire nuclear devices, know-how and capability on the plea of keeping themselves prepared to face any eventuality or threat to their sovereignty and integrity. That the nuclear missiles have been sold by some nuclear powers to smaller countries even after they signed CTBT is becoming more and more evident. This is causing tension not only for the region concerned but the entire world. One cannot rule out the armed conflicts or deny threats to world peace.

As regards the United Nations, it is proving 'helpless' because it has to depend on these very big powers, the nuclear nations, for funds and other resources. In fact, some of these powers have already started black-mailing the world body on this account. Given this kind of situation, how safe can the ordinary citizen of the world feel? It is believed that nuclear weapons already produced and available in different arsenals have the capacity to destroy millions of people in a matter of minutes and that even one-third of the existing ammunition is sufficient to destroy the whole world. Then, if nuclear weapons are used, the smoke may continue to prevail in the environment for months together causing all kinds of diseases and endangering the health of those who happen to survive or escape being hit by a nuclear weapon directly. The crops may perish and the earth, which has already its share of vast deserts, mountains and other barren regions, may lose its fertility, which may never return or take centuries to revive. Thus, even if humanity survives in part, it will be an utterly mutilated mass inhabiting a totally defaced earth.

In any case, the fact remains that even the signing of CTBT is failing to eliminate the threat of total annihilation of the mankind because the weapons continue to be available and the race to acquire or produce more does continue. It is also evident that a big chunk of valuable resources of the world is being spent on this single subject i.e. Security.

International Terrorism

Terrorism is no longer a domestic problem of a single country or nation; it has already acquired international dimensions. Though comparatively small in volume, international terrorism is already causing worry to the world leaders and defying their efforts to suppress it. In many cases it has become an effective weapon for one country to wage a proxy war against another.

The factors contributing to the spread of terrorism are generally believed to include frustration, political intolerance and secessionism. But most of the nations face complications on account of terrorism caused by religious intolerance and caste prejudices, whether genuine or used as a cover to some 'divide and destroy' game. In any case, terrorism or violence in the name of any religious faith, spiritual master or holy scripture is a sinful violation of what they sought to preach.

Moral Degeneration

The threat to the peace of world and the life and property of the citizens in general becomes all the more real and dreadful when we look at the moral degeneration on the part of those who are supposed to preside over the destiny of nations and shape the future of civilisations. More and more instances are coming to light to show the unfortunate lack of integrity at higher levels of various societies, including governments. Some of them are found prepared to cause any harm or loss to others for their own selfish motives. They may make nations fight simply to stay in power themselves. They don't care a hoot for others, when it comes to what they believe is in their interest.

When the human mind is inflicted by selfishness, when all kinds of weapons are available in the arsenals and when mercenaries are roaming all around, only God may save the common man. Exploitation is bound to flourish, which may cause frustration and then clash. Distrust may prevail at every level, ushering in hatred, jealousy and discord. In short, there is very little scope for humanity to survive when the very physicians are found causing epidemics.

No Right

In all fairness, the present generation has no right to destroy the objects of Nature, the bounties of the Almighty, that render this planet or ours so charming and fascinating, or dismantle whatever has been achieved by our ancestors or predecessors with all their thought and action and safeguarded with heavy price including sacrifice of life. On the other hand, we must endeavour to contribute something positive and achieve as much as possible so that the coming generations have only to admire us and not to condemn. We should not only preserve what is good, but also endeavour for the better, if not the best.

We may also display due magnanimity and discard what is bad. We should take it as our sacred duty to remove all the hazards from the path of progress. For this we must ensure that peace prevails all over and does not become a casualty in any way in any part of the world on any pretext.

The Mission's View

The Sant Nirankari Mission, a spiritual movement, has its own way to look at the situation. It is convinced that the degeneration of moral values and alienation from truth is keeping the man baffled. Ignorant and misguided, he is committing all kinds of violence either for his own selfishness or that of some other vested interests. In fact, the Mission has already paid a very heavy price for the spread of its voice of truth and experienced how far the orthodox can go or be exploited. It had its own share of opposition to truth, criticism based on rumours and conspirancies of the vested interests. Many Nirankaris, including the former Head of the Mission, Baba Gurbachan Singh have laid down their lives at the hands of misguided fanaticism and its terrorism.

As a world-phenomenon, the Mission feels, violence is the result of hatred brooded by ego and pride. Ego itself means that man is selfish, narrow-minded, arrogant and intolerant. His vision is so veiled that he fails to see beyond self. He wants to acquire and possess as much material wealth as possible, otherwise his ego may feel hurt. He is just not prepared to tolerate a situation where the others may possess more than he does. Notwithstanding the huge property or wealth at his own disposal, man would start feeling poor simply because someone else happens to acquire more. A mad race thus starts which knows no end. And even the means applied may not always be fair and just. Man would not hesitate from cheating, oppressing and exploiting others for his selfish ends. Violence too is not ruled out.

This sense of ego and pride takes all the more dangerous dimension when it comes to groups. Whether based on language, region or culture, each such segment of population would like to possess an identity of its own, superior and pride worthy. We find one group clashing with another because it would like to dominate and command. People subscribing to a particular culture may hate other as inferior. In many cases one group would like to eliminate the other just to enlarge its own influence. People may like to thrust their own diet and dress patterns on others for this very purpose.

Similarly, one country may like to dominate the other, so that its own proud disposition gets asserted. Since it means a threat to the unity, integrity and sovereignty of the others, a clash follows invariably. Nations fight against one another in the name of self-respect, just another name for ego and pride.

In many cases religious faith is found to be the reason for hatred and violence. Communalism nurtured by ignorance and superstition takes on the man's relation with God based on truth. One declares one's own religious faith, caste, community as superior to those of others and hates them, shuns them. We have instances of social segregation between the two sets of the same faith. We find untouchability based on caste and Apartheid based on colour. One is just not prepared to tolerate the other.

The phenomenon becomes all the more deplorable when we find that hatred and violence are resorted to in the name of those spiritual masters and holy scriptures

who never professed them. Religious festivals are disturbed simply because the rejoicings of one faction are not to be tolerated by the other.

Remedy

The Mission describes it as pollution of mind and suggests that it should be cleansed from within. The very thinking of man which has become vicious with adverse feelings of hatred, jealousy and discord, must change. It is convinced that even if produced, no weapon by itself can cause any harm; it will become dangerous only when some human mind overwhelmed by negative thoughts and feelings takes the charge and operates it. Hence the remedy to the human tendency towards hatred and violence lies in taming the mind and bringing it to the path of truth leading to love, peace and understanding.

In order to imbibe the sublime human qualities, righteous traits and moral values, one must get united with their source i.e. God. So long as the man's actions and pursuits are determined by his own mind, intellect and wisdom under the overall command of 'ego', he is bound to give preference to what is visible even though perishable. The soul will remain subdued and veiled from what is true, permanent and steadfast i.e., God. This is where the Mission helps one and all, with the blessings of the True Master, presently His Holiness Baba Hardev Singh Ji Maharaj. Once God is revealed, the soul meets its source, the super-soul and emerges from the veil of darkness into the realm of divine light. Automatically, it takes the charge of all that one thinks and does. The mind, intellect and wisdom surrender in its favour and so does 'ego'. In fact ego bows out, along with all its manifestation i.e. hatred, jealousy, ill-will and so on. Now there is love, cooperation and understanding; there is peace. And once there is peace within, the calm prevails outside also.

A spiritually enlightened person realises the Fatherhood of God leading spontaneously to the brotherhood of mankind. He or she finds the image of the one and the same Supreme Father in every human being. The whole human society thus stands unified into one world-family, universal Brotherhood. And with this the very attitude of man stands transformed from hatred into love, jealousy into cooperation and violence into non-violence. All that is created by God looks beautiful, charming and truthful. There is no intention to violate it, destroy it.

Tolerance

In order to tackle the demon of communal hatred and religious intolerance, the Mission explains that God created all as human beings. Their religion, if at all, should be humanity, the religion for all. All religions known to the world are man's own creation. Even then, they should have no reason to clash, as God they seek to worship, adore or praise is one and the same. God may be given different names in appreciation of the vast variety of the Divine traits, but that should not mean that we have as many Gods, different for different groups of people

inhabiting different parts of the world, subscribing to different religious faiths and belonging to different sects, castes or communities.

Truly speaking, all religious faiths do recognise that God is one, formless, omnipresent, all-pervading, eternal and infinite. But when it comes to God worship, different people follow different ways. Some go to one place or worship while others go to some other. At times, they undertake long and hazardous journeys because they have faith in a particular shrine. They sit in penance by the side of water or fire. They read and recite holy scriptures—different for different faiths. And the most important fact is that each dislikes the others, so much so that there is hatred, jealousy and, many times, violence. Perhaps there would have been no problem if they had chosen to follow their own path and feel blissful. But they run down each other, which leads to conflict. According to one estimate violence flamed by religious intolerance has caused more loss of life than all other wars in the world; and it is further believed that more than 95 percent of the wars were related to religious intolerance directly or indirectly.

The Mission seeks to help such people by explaining to them that following different modes of worship does not mean that we have as many Gods. Hindus do not have an exclusive God of their own, different from that of Muslims, simply because they worship Him in a temple and not in a mosque, Rama is not different from Allah, God or Whaeguru; they are different names given to one and the same Supreme Entity; and they are all equally loveable, respectable.

It is, therefore, pointed out here that one must know God before adopting any mode of worship. Even Lord Christ advised man to 'Know God Ye worship'. Once God is known from the one who is already familiar with the Divine Secret i.e. the True Master, there shall be no clash, no dispute no controversy—whatever the name, whatever, the place used for remembering God. The Mission tells its followers that realising the presence or existence of God all the time everywhere and remembering the Almighty in all circumstances is the best mode of God worship, rather devotion to God. And this can be adopted by any individual irrespective of his or her religious faith. Tolerance on this account shall be spontaneous, automatic. There will be no reason, no ground to run down one another or come into clash. There will be peace within and harmony outside.

The Mission considers any dispute in the name of religious faith, the great spiritual masters and holy scriptures as futile. It tells the world that we must show respect and reverence to all saints, Gurus and prophets and value all religious scriptures as precious treasures of God-knowledge. The Mission's emphasis is, however, on practical approach to their teachings. After God-realisation, one worships God by submitting to the Divine will and not merely by reciting the Divine Name. A devotee cannot be True to his or her faith unless he or she acts on the teachings of the spiritual master he or she believes in and the principles enunciated in the holy scripture he or she reads or worships.

Similar is the Mission's approach to rites and rituals, which unfortunately tend to differentiate one religious faith from the other. It explains that all human effort by way of repeating God's name, sitting in silent trance or penance by the side of fire or water, undertaking pilgrimages, taking holy dip and other religious practices will have no meaning unless and until one knows the God one worships. And, once God is realised, there will be no disputes whatsoever based on these rites and rituals.

Tackling Ego

The Mission seeks to tackle the devil of ego, where it springs from. It tells its followers that all worldly assets should be treated as ultimately belonging to the Supreme Giver, God. These may include physical strength, intellectual ability as well as material wealth. Man should treat himself as a trustee. He should make use of the same so long as ordained by the divine will. He should at no time declare himself as the ultimate owner or the doer.

Once this is understood, man will never take pride in whatever he possesses, including physical strength, intellectual ability and material wealth. Since he has surrendered the idea of being their owner in favour of the Almighty, he will have no reason to be proud. He will be convinced that all that visible, all worldly wealth, is a false shadow and not permanent. He will, therefore, not look down upon those who are less fortunate. Nor he will envy those who happen to be richer and wealthier than himself. On the other hand, he will be grateful to God for making him 'the trustee' of whatever is at his disposal. He will feel contented and hence happy.

Similarly, a man with lesser possessions will not complain of poverty. He will not feel jealous of those who happen to be more fortunate. He too shall feel contented with whatever he has at his disposal. He too shall, therefore, be happy. In both the cases the real happiness will flow from Divine knowledge, the realisation of the presence of the Formless One everywhere, all the time and in every object—animate as well as inanimate. As often pointed out by Nirankari Baba Hardev Singh Ji Maharaj, here Janak is not happy because he is a king and has all the worldly wealth at his command, nor Kabir's lacking in worldly comforts is a hindrance to his happiness. The two are equally happy because the source of happiness is the same treasure of wealth of Divine knowledge.

Going a step further, this principle will help its subscriber or follower to eschew the sense of greed and passion. He will not exploit others in the race for becoming more prosperous and feeling superior. Naturally, He will neither have tension for himself, nor cause it for others. Since there will be no clash, there will be no animosity, no discord, no conflict, no suffering, no sorrow.

This Mission further says that one should not be proud of one's caste, creed and colour and discriminate against others on this account. Somebody's faith in a particular religious faith or the mode of worship should not become a reason for

looking down upon him or her as inferior. When Truth is one and the same, why should the seekers quarrel or fight? They should rather love each other and co-exist in a spirit of equality and fraternity. One should appreciate that all human beings are the creation of the same Almighty. They should, therefore, be loved as such without any consideration whether one belongs to one religious faith or the other. Even otherwise, religious faith, whatsoever its nomenclature, should unite people and not divide them.

So, this principle being suggested by the Mission to its followers also seeks to save them from the evil of pride and promote communal harmony, religious tolerance and social understanding. Once all human beings are looked at as God's children, the very reason for discrimination and hatred does end, giving place to love, goodwill and peace.

Similarly, one should not hate or criticise others on account of their diet, dress and culture, declaring one's own as superior and pride-worthy. The Mission is convinced that such diversities are bound to exist, because they are dictated by Nature through different climates. Moreover, what one eats, drinks or wears is related to the body, having nothing to do with the soul. One may, therefore, eat, drink or wear what one likes, but in no way it should become a reason to be proud. One should not preach one's own choice and thrust it upon others and thus add on to the dimensions of discord, tension and conflict.

In fact, no uniformity can and should be imposed on this account. Human unity can be realised in spite of these diversities. In a way, when one rises above different religious ideologies, he or she should have no problem in tolerating any dress and food habits, which are bound to vary from region to region. One must value the soul, which cannot be defiled by anything one eats, drink or wears.

Notwithstanding this ideal approach to food and dress habits of others, the Mission, however, advises its followers to refrain from taking any kind of intoxicants. It considers the same as the root cause of various social evils. It means that one must avoid the evil, but possess no feeling of hatred towards others on this ground.

There is a general feeling that God cannot be realised unless one gives up one's domestic life and all the responsibilities it carries. There are instances where we see people becoming ascetic or recluse just because they are keen to know the spiritual truth. They think that unless they sit in silence penance and meditate in a lonely place in forests or in the hills, they cannot be counted among the devotees of God. The Mission, however, proclaims that God can be realised while performing normal duties of daily life, the only effort required being to seek the shelter of the one who has already known God, i.e. the True Master. One should not run away from his or her responsibilities towards self, the family and the society at large on this pretext and become a burden on others. The Mission believes that one must behave like a responsible citizen and work hard, earn his or her own livelihood and save as much as he or she can for the service of the

community or the mankind. Secondly, it does not favour becoming an ascetic or recluse because this is also likely to make one egoistic and proud. One may think oneself to be superior as a 'devotee of God' and condemn others rather hate them as 'sinners' who to perform all kinds of duties of a householder, pleasant and unpleasant. So, here again the Mission seeks to attack the evil of ego and pride by persuading its followers to make their life purposeful and useful not only for themselves, but others also.

COMPANY OF SAINTS

Whereas the Mission does not propose to offer a new religion to a seeker of truth, whereas it gives full freedom to stay with one's religious faith, and whereas it shows respect to all such faiths and holy scriptures, the only advice it gives to its followers is that one should spend as much time in the company of saints as possible. This will make the devotee's faith in God steadfast and safeguard him or her from all kinds of worldly hazards. It also inspires the participants to serve the fellow-devotees and others selflessly. Today the Mission is organising congregations at different places throughout the world and millions are taking advantage.

A Nirankari congregation centre or Satsang Bhawan is, however, not a place of worship. It is a house like any other house in the locality, the only difference being that it is open to one and all who seek to know the Truth, perceive God and praise the Almighty.

Experience shows that a person in the company of the True Master and fellow—devotees will not think of anything that may make him or her clash with others. He or she will be praising God and expressing gratitude to the True Master who has bestowed the divine light upon him or her and made life meaningful, purposeful and useful.

TRUE MASTER

All agree that only an enlightened soul can help another soul to realise the super-soul, God and enjoy the bliss of the way of life discussed above. And here is the True Master, the Nirankari Baba, who shows us the way to know the Truth and associate the Almighty Nirankar, the Formless God, with all our thoughts and actions. Every seeker of Truth is welcome here, notwithstanding his or her religious faith, caste, creed or colour, social status etc. The message here is that of love, humanity, peace and prosperity. This has already endeared the Sant Nirankari Mission to millions in India and abroad. Everywhere the Nirankari Baba has been welcomed as apostle of peace.

TURNING POINT

Today, the mankind has reached a turning point. Going straight or continuing the journey of life on the path of falsehood, hatred jealously, cheating and exploiting, suppressing and oppressing, clash and conflict, it may fast approach a total collapse. As we have seen, the world arsenals are fully equipped to supply the arms and ammunition; man has only to trigger them off. This is the way leading to moral degradation and degeneration of noble feelings of love, peace and tolerance. This is the way where one fails to find unity, equality and fraternity. Treading this path, one may be found in pursuit of what is illusion, unreal and perishable, thus gaining no lasting happiness.

The other way is, of course, the way being shown by the Nirankari Baba and his Mission, the way of Truth, love and peace. This is the way of tolerance, amity and unity. Here man is contented with what he has. He is liberated from 'fear and want' as also the ego and the ills that it broods—jealousy, hatred and violence. This is the way that makes man a man; this is the way where one does not come across any discrimination. This is the way where every consideration is given to the fundamental human right, worth and dignity, social progress and better standard of life—all that the world has been aspiring to achieve through the UN Charter and other measures. Here the effort, however, does not involve any stress and strain, toil and tears, simply because the route adopted is that of spiritual awakening. Peace here is found within, so that calm prevails outside automatically. The effort towards world peace and prosperity has, therefore, better prospects of success here than elsewhere.

The choice is with the present generation. If we want to deface this earth by nuclear weapons and be cursed by the generations, if any, that succeed, we may continue the journey, the pursuit of Mammon and face the disaster. Otherwise, we may follow the Nirankari path, the path of realising God, knowing the Supreme Father and living as one human fraternity enjoying all the benefits of unity and equality. His Holiness, Nirankari Baba Hardev Singh Ji Maharaj is here to bless us all with the Divine Light that will enable us to see the image of God in every human being and extend love, respect and cooperation to one and all.

And let us not forget that the time at our disposal is quite limited. The world is already on the verge of destruction. And luckily, the alternative is also here, within the reach of all. We have only to make the choice and make 'The Choice Today'.