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EDITORIAL

JE SUIS ÉCRIVAIN (I AM WRITER)



We witnessed another act of mindless violence in France. In spite of the fact that India has been a victim of religious intolerance for many years and witnessed such ghastly attacks on innocent people innumerable times, we are doubly shocked not only because of the loss of lives but more importantly because this is tantamount to an attack on free press and freedom of expression. The limit of freedom of expression is debatable and a controversial issue, the line which when crossed results in insult can hardly be defined, but it is equally true that killings cannot be supported under any circumstances.

I am not very familiar with *Charlie Hebdo* cartoons but I can imagine the loss if such an attack would have happened to Laxman (who died after this editorial was written), Shanker or anyone who had consistently criticized political and social ideas to highlight the deficiencies in the society and the system.

The word religion comes from the Greek word 'religio' which according to the Oxford dictionary means 'bind' or 'reverence'. Violence is detrimental to binding people. No religion teaches to kill people. Religion teaches us to be humane, helps us to build our character. Swami

Vivekananda once said at the conclusion of his talk at the Parliament of Religion in Chicago that every religion has produced men and women of the most exalted character.

While these thoughts were circulating in my mind, I had the good fortune of attending a talk by His Holiness Dalai Lama on "A Human Approach to World Peace" in the Presidency University on January 13, 2015. According to him peace can be achieved not by keeping your enemy isolated but by making friendship with him. Human beings are social animals and intuitively we want to communicate, we want to live with others. According to His Holiness, the last century was an age of violence while this century will be the 'age of dialogue'.

One cannot make the world flat in terms of culture, religion or even faith. I think it is pertinent to discuss a

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little about what Swami Vivekananda had said as his concluding remarks in his Chicago address. His comment from one hundred twenty years ago is still valid and should be followed. About conversion, he clearly said, "The Christian is not to become a Hindu or a Buddhist, nor a Hindu or Buddhist to become a Christian. But each must assimilate the spirit of the

others and yet preserve his individuality and grow according to his own law of growth." He further said, "The seed is put in the ground, and earth and air and water are placed around it. Does the seed become the earth, or the air, or the water? No. It becomes a plant. It develops after the law of its own growth, assimilates the air, the earth, and

the water, converts them into plant substance, and grows into a plant.” He concluded, “If anybody dreams of the exclusive survival of his own religion and the destruction of the others, I pity him from the bottom of my heart, and point out to him that upon the banner of every religion will soon be written in spite of resistance: “Help and not fight,” “Assimilation and not Destruction,” “Harmony and Peace and not Dissension.”

We are aware of the saying “The pen is mightier than the sword” which was first written by novelist and playwright Edward Bulwer-Lytton in 1839 in his historical play *Cardinal Richelieu*. Richlieu, who was the chief minister to King Louis XIII, and a priest, was unable to take arms against enemies although he knew about the plot

to kill him fully well. He refused to take weapons and said “The pen is mightier than the sword. Take away the

sword; States can be saved without it.’ The French version is: “La plume est plus forte que l’epee.”

As an editor and writer we still believe in the old proverb “The pen is mightier than the sword” and we believe that if one pencil breaks into two, both will still work but a gun when broken will

become totally useless. Gun or no gun, the culture of criticism, the culture of appreciating satirical (or satanical) verses with humour will continue to remain unabated. Or in the words of Khushwant Singh, “No one has so far invented a condom for a writer’s pen.” □

S. C. Roy

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