

43. Actors and action

RARELY do I preside over a dramatic performance; I have come here tonight, because you are having a play on "Shri Sailam" and on a great devotee drawn by the deity to that temple and also because the author is a devotee for years. What exactly is a drama? It is a dream within a dream. It is a dream which unfolds before you, even while you are "awake," another dream. It tries to shed some light, some joy, some courage, some faith, some hope, some meaning on the dream called life. Naturally, man has to seek all means of discovering the meaning of life. For, without knowing it, he is lost; he wanders from birth to birth, receiving knock after knock, and is seldom the better for all the experience.

He must first know that he is deluded into taking the body, the objects and the sense-experienced world, as real. Then, he must seek to know the real basis, which is mistaken to be something else. That delusion is deep-rooted; it has warped the outlook and put man on the wrong track. The drama must be aimed at showing man that he is deluded by a false sense of values; that he is running after vanities, leaving reality behind. It should instill into man faith, strong enough to make him recoil from that pursuit, and gain the glory of discovering his great illusion.

The sorrows of life can be ended not through hatred and injustice; these only breed more of the species. They will yield only to nobler and higher thoughts and experiences, germinating from the pure heart where the Lord resides. This drama, on Hemareddy Mallamma, deals with such experiences arising from the heart of a sincere devotee and that is the reason, as I already said, why I agreed to preside over this second anniversary of the Kurnool District Kalaa Parishad and why I stayed on until the entire play was enacted.

Service to man is service to God

Whatever talent a person has, should be dedicated to the service of the rest of humanity, indeed, of all living beings. Therein lies fulfilment. All men are kin, they are of the same likeness, the same build; moulded out of the same material, with the same divine essence in each. Service to man will help your divinity to blossom, for, it will gladden your heart and make you feel that life has been worth-while. Service to man is service to God, for He is in every man and every living being and in every stone and stump. Offer your talents at the feet of God; let every act be a flower, free from creeping worms of envy and egoism, and full of the fragrance of love and sacrifice. If you have the talent for acting dramatic roles, well, use it for the glorification of God, for the uplifting of man.

A question often raised when people talk of dramas or films is this: Are the people who flock to them bringing down the level of these items of entertainment? Or, are the artistes responsible for lowering it? I must say that your responsibility as artistes and writers is much greater, you must not stoop to methods and tricks that will bring in more money perhaps, but, which sow seeds of evil and vice in the minds of the people, who flock to the theatres. A person who comes in to see a play or a film must move out of the theatre a better man, a stronger and more courageous man, and, not a poorer and weaker man, less equipped to resist the temptations of the world. Remember this when you select a play for the stage or when you take up your pen to write one, and you will be on the right path.

To the actors, I must speak a word. You wear the dress and equipment of noble souls and saints; you impersonate even divine characters; you reel off words of high purpose and noble ideals, and exhibit deeply thrilling experiences. You do all this very realistically. It is a sign of your skill and

your untiring practice. You inspire people to better their lives; from you, they learn the path of inner peace and devotion, for you re-enact before their eyes the lives of great saints.

Develop the *saadhana* of self-effacement

All this is very good. But, is it too much to ask that you show in your own lives, outside the stage, that the godly path is the best and the safest and perhaps even the smoothest? Take this role of the actor as a good guide for your own betterment. It is a *saadhana* which will give you peace. Raamakrishna Paramahansa actually lived the roles of *Puraanic* characters like Raadha and Hanumaan and realised Krishna and Raama through identification with the experiences of each.

Become one with the holy characters you represent; derive inspiration and joy therefrom, your acting too will thereby improve vastly; you will earn the gratitude of thousands. Feminine characteristics appeared in Raamakrishna's physical body when he intensely believed himself to be Raadha yearning for a vision of Krishna; when he identified himself with Hanumaan and spent months on trees, uttering only Raamanaama, his anatomy changed; he grew an incipient tail. That was the measure of the depth of his *bhaava* (thought power), of the self-effacement. Use the dramatic art and the chances it gives you to develop the *saadhana* of self-effacement, for that is the quickest means of realisation of the real Self.

Make the theatre holy and sanctifying

I must mention another point also. The author of this play is also here and you have this day honoured him for services to your Parishath and to the cause of "drama". Whenever you write a play, transform all that is low and worldly into the high and the other-worldly. Do not treat the low things as low; treat them as lapses, as mistakes, failures, incomplete attempts, errors to be avoided. Increase the *aloukika* (non-worldly) aspect of all relations between person and person. Human beings are not mere bodies, appetites, hungers and thirst, passions and prejudices. These are impediments, lapses.

Consider rather the aspirations, the ideals, the dreams of unity and universality, the struggle for truth, for mercy, for grace, for sympathy, for liberation, and depict these in the plays you write. That will change the atmosphere of the theatre and make it holy, sanctifying. You will then be helping men to become stronger and the nation to become more enduring. Now, people are sliding down the easy gradient of vice and vanity; arrest that process. Open their eyes to the chasm that yawns below.

I bless you that you succeed in raising the standard of conduct and behaviour, the standard of morals and manners, the standard of social and individual discipline and instill deep desire for discovering the inner Divinity.

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