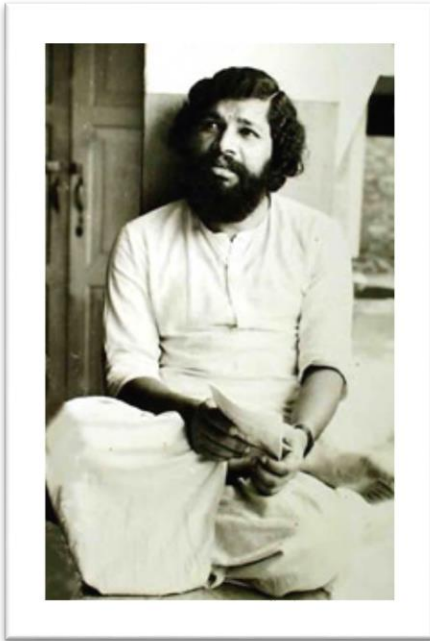


Travelogue

Visit to an Amish Community - 2001

SWAMI BODHANANDA



... I came back from the Amish Territory an hour back. Essentially, we visited a patriarch, 67 years old, potbellied carpenter - preacher and father of eleven: sons (8) and daughters (3) and sixty seven grandchildren. I saw two of his sons and three

daughters and several grandchildren. His furniture show room was full of furniture and they were cheap too. There were cows grazing in enclosed pastures. Three big houses shelter his ever expanding brood.

Amish people are Christians who broke off from papacy in the 16th century on doctrinal matters. They believed that an adult alone should be baptized, and that Christian should practice the teaching of Jesus Christ. The Roman Catholics and Lutheran Protestants unleashed the most vicious physical violence against this unarmed and sworn non-violent people for this slight deviation from the official path. The Amish people were hunted down; their leaders were thrown in to dungeons, 3 square feet by 9 feet deep, after most murderous tortures.

I saw in the museum some specimen instruments used for torture. Then all these people came to Pennsylvania (Penn's woodland) on the invitation of William Penn, a Quaker who escaped from Europe with his followers and settled in the US. All married Amish men wear beard like the Muslims--moustache removed from upper lips and side of the cheeks.

They live in joint family. Women, as mark of obedience to God and husbands cover their heads with a piece of white cloth. They wear simple clothes and meet twice in a month for a three-hour worship in different homes. They don't have a formal church building. Any adult male member can officiate a priest.

Amish homes are simple, self-built and they live on produce from their land. Their children study in their own schools and after completing eighth grade they join family trade or farming. I talked to two young men, siblings of 18 and 15 years of age, who have joined their father (patriarch's second son) in his furniture manufacturing business. They use home generated electricity and modest tools and machinery.

Furniture was of highest quality and perfection. They generally don't go to doctors, unless absolutely necessary. Deliveries of babies are assisted by community nurses. They don't use cars, electricity, T.V, or telephones. What struck me sad was that they all looked, especially women and children, sullen and depressed, resigned to their fate. Children were emaciated, their eyes bulging with skinny bodies and vacant looks. They all looked strange and lost.

May be my prejudice and lack of sympathy. May be I am judgmental. But I think in these matters objective standards are possible. True, their lifestyle is environmentally superb, but I must say that these people are stuck somewhere in the past, perhaps they left their souls in the dungeons from which they escaped after years of struggle. Alas! The torturer and the tortured are both damned, it seems.

Source: Swami Bodhananda in an Email response: Sent on Wednesday August 21, 2002, 8.36am.

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