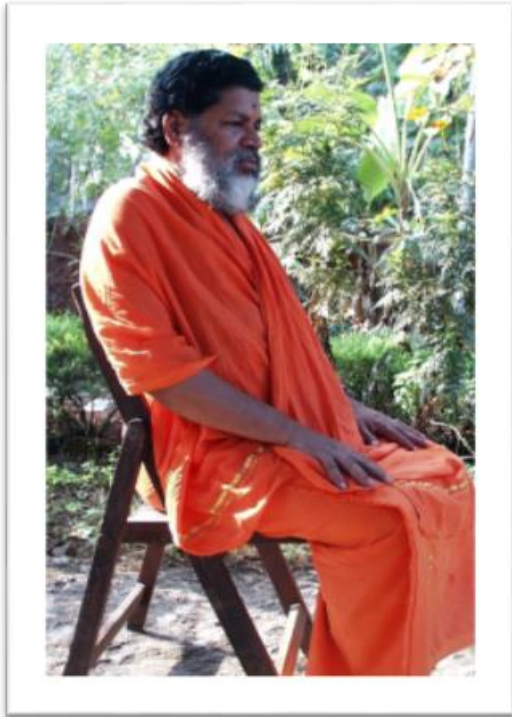


SAINT & SAINTLINESS

SWAMI BODHANANDA

1981



Saintliness cannot be acquired. It has to be discovered as one's own essential nature. When I appreciate my incapacity to hurt or get hurt by an individual, event or situation, I recognise the saint that I am. Thus the sure mark of a saint is this incapacity to wound or get wounded. Such a sanctimonious person remains ever as fresh and innocent as a morning lily, as pliable and tender as a tropical creeper, and as accommodating and unresisting as the infinite space.

The external expression of saints varies according to conditionings that they have acquired down the millennia genetically, racially. But the essential sweetness and fragrance that emanates through such expressions remain the same. An Aurobindo cloistered in his wooden panelled study hatching out of wonderful phrases, ideas and imageries may appear diametrically opposed to a Ramakrishna Paramahansa stammering out rustic tales and anecdotes clumsily squatting on a rickety charpai.

A Vivekananda roaring down to the learned assembly of religious leaders, majestically dominating the stage in his gorgeous orange robes may look an incongruent counterpart of a Ramana Maharshi in his meagre loin attire silently smiling to an unlettered aspirant. A Christ on the cross meekly suffering the agony of crucifixion may seem an absolute antithesis to Lord Krishna, whip in his hand in the battle field exhorting the unwilling Arjuna to fight a bloody war. A Naranattu Bhrantan gleefully immersed in his purposeless labour of rolling a huge stone up and down the slopes of the mountain, resting in the graveyards, contemptuously looking down upon the tempting and seductive world may stand out ridiculous compared to a Krishnamurti elegantly employing slick words and streamlined phrases in Oxford accent to bring out the profound silence that he experiences.

From a peripheral view, these saints look different from each other. But a perspicacious observer can see the golden cord of saintliness running through all their apparently contradictory expressions. They show a profound concern for the problems of the world, and an incredible unconcern for their own. They have infinite capacity to patiently suffer without being revengeful, to remain ever hopeful without being expectant; they are always unpredictable and remain choicelessly alone. If nobody answers their call they prefer to walk alone.

Saintliness is born out of inner contentment, is an expression of a state of non-desiring. The saint's inner plenitude is not the least affected by the lavishness of his external munificence. That quality of total renunciation makes him loving and lovable. Nobody is afraid of a saint and the saint is afraid of anybody. Fear appears where give and take is involved.

Who is a saint? What are his marks? What makes him saintly? What is the essence of his saintliness? Arjuna asked these questions to Lord Krishna: O Lord, tell me the marks of a wise man steadied in his vision." Lord answered that one who is ever awareful and has a mastery over his desires is a wise man, one

who is contended with what he has, never desiring for a change.

Slavery to desires is unsaintly. Hence, a saint, in Sanskrit is called a 'Swami', a master. The saints strike no roots anywhere. They are pathless people, their path cannot be mapped out nor can it be traced back. Their callings are different; their source of inspiration is different. A saint is ever victorious for his victories leaves none vanquished behind. A victory without a victor and vanquished is a lasting victory. Such victories leave no bitter memories, nor any need for revenge. Christ murmured, 'O Lord, they don't know what they are doing'. He on the cross betrayed no resentment or anger. He only felt sorry for his persecutors. In this sense a saint is most unpredictable by the ordinary standards. There can be scholarly or illiterate saints, mild or furious ones, flamboyant or self-effacing, socially committed or socially unconcerned, dynamic or dozing, of all shades and hues. Still they remain beyond all definitions, far beyond the confines of social, historical and psychological categories. They are what they are inspite of everything. They don't choose to be saints, but they discover themselves to be saints. Theirs is the only authentic, free and relaxed life. Their presence is often an enigma, sometimes even a nuisance to the selfish conformist world. Their style of living is a non-violent rebellion and a destabilizing factor in the security-mongering hypocrite world.

A saint is a disturbing question mark and his saintliness gives him the authority to hurl at the world answerless questions. He is a mystery, always secure, living the most insecure life. He is the question and the answer, the beginning and the end.

(From a published article by Swami Bodhananda in a magazine in 1981)

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