

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

Saprem Namaskar.

Gita Jayanti is the Utsava we celebrate mainly to invigorate ourselves by diving deep into our scriptures. Gita gives in a very simple and yet profound manner the Vedic Wisdom. Whether a pandit or an ordinary person, aged or young, a leader or a follower, Gita is for all. Gita represents not only the wisdom of Vedas but also gives such a synthesis of thought that we can resolve all the paradoxes of life. But this insight in Gita we cannot get by giving cursory reading of just celebrating Gita Jayanti. The study of Gita has to be daily with reverent contemplation for whole life.

Gita is like a mother who takes us in her lap when we are grieved and sad. She is like a Guru who guides us for achieving the goal of life and also guides us in our path. She is also like a goddess who protects us from the fall if we hold on to her. She is also the scriptural form of our dear motherland as She tells all that which this land of ours is manifesting in her national life.

Sometimes people quote the saying of Swami Vivekananda that, "You will be nearer to Heaven through football than through the study of Gita" and say that the game of football is more important than the study of Gita. But it is missing the point. Gita is not for mere intellectual study but it is to be practiced in life, as for us religion is not in believing but in being and becoming. Swami Vivekananda said, "You will understand Gita better with your biceps, your muscles, a little stronger. You will understand the mighty genius and the mighty strength of Krishna better with a little of strong blood in you ...If one reads this one shloka –Klaibyam ma sma gamah Partha ...- one gets all the merits of reading the entire Gita; for in this one shloka lies embedded the whole Message of the Gita ...for all of us in this world, life is a continuous fight ... Many a time comes when we want to interpret our weakness and cowardice as forgiveness and renunciation ... Gita opens with this very significant verse: Arise O Prince! Give up this fainthearted-ness, this weakness, Stand up and fight."

A tamasik and coward cannot face the battles of life. To be fearless and not to be chickenhearted one requires strong body and courageous heart. Strong and not weak men can practice Gita. It is to develop that strength, Swamiji said 'Play Football'.

Secondly, the game of football is completely a team game. Each second, each action and each intention of the team member is to be internalized by each team member. With all efforts and best play by a player, it is possible that the credit of making goal may not go to that player but some one else in the team.

Each one in the team offers his best to the team effort and does not make any individual claims. That is what is Yagna- the central theme of Gita. Offer the fruit of your action to the society at large and partake only the Yganashishtah - whatever remains for you. That is, one must have that team spirit, that humility to be part of the team and then to do the best of whatever comes to our lot. After doing work to the best of the ability offer it again to the

collectivity at large and partake whatever comes to your share. This dynamics can be seen explicitly in the game of football. That is why Swamiji had said that to understand Gita better play football. Here 'playing football' is not given as the remedy to understand Gita but as an indication of what is required to understand Gita.

Nowadays there is lot of awakening regarding the religious conversion that is taking place. Srikrishna tells us in Gita why conversion should not be resorted to. He says 'Paradharmo bhayavah' – the religious practices of others could be horrible for our growth. He says, 'swalpamapyasya dharmasya trayate mahato bhayat' – even a little but regular practice of our own Dharma can be elevating. Commenting on that Swami Vivekananda had said, "Even if you have knowledge, do not disturb the childlike faith of the ignorant. On the other hand, go down to their level and gradually bring them up. That is a very powerful idea, and it has become the ideal in India. That is why you can see a great philosopher or Vedantin like Sri Shankaracharya going into a temple and worshipping images. It is not hypocrisy. Swami Vivekananda while talking about the service to the masses always used to say that, "Elevate the masses without injuring their innate spirituality."

Why there should be conversion at all? Only a person who has no understanding of God would resort to convert others or would limit God to his god. God is not different but is only worshiped and prayed to with different names. Swami Vivekananda further explains, "Sri Krishna says, "Even those who worship other deities are really worshiping me" It is God incarnate whom man is worshiping. Would God be angry if you called Him by the wrong name? He would be no God at all! Can't you understand that whatever a man has in his own heart is God-even if he worships a stone. What of that!

We will understand more clearly if we once get rid of the idea that religion consists in doctrines. One idea of a religion has been that the whole world was born because Adam ate the apple, and there is no way of escape. Believe in Jesus Christ-in a certain man's death! But in India there is a quite different idea. There religion means realization, nothing else. It does not matter whether one approaches the destination in a carriage with four horses, in an electric car, or rolling on the ground. The goal is the same. For the Christians the problem is how to escape the wrath of the terrible God. For Indians it is how to become what they really are, to regain their lost selfhood.... Therefore, Krishna says, if your method is better and higher, you have no business to say that another man's method is bad, however wicked you may think it.

Again we must consider, religion is a matter of growth, not a mass of foolish words. Two thousand years ago a man saw God. Moses saw God in a burning bush. Does what Moses did when he saw God save you? No man's seeing God can help you least bit except that it may excite you and urge you to do the same thing.

That is the whole value of the ancient's examples. Nothing more. Just like signposts on the way. No man's eating can satisfy another man. You have to see God yourself... Each one thinks his method is best. Very good. But remember, it may be good for you....Because it is good for you do not jump to the conclusion that your method is everybody's method.

Sri Krishna says, "Better die in your own religion than attempt the path of another." This is my path, and I am down here. And you are way up there, and I am down here. And you are way up there, and I am always tempted to give up my path thinking I will go there and be with you. And if I give up, I am neither there nor here. We must not lose sight of this doctrine. It is all a matter of growth. Wait and grow, and you attain everything; otherwise

there will be great spiritual danger. Here is the fundamental secret of teaching religion. (Vol I – Gita III)” A person who is truly religious will never resort to convert others or deride the faith of others as false.

Even one of the attributes of God is that he accepts all the people as they are and does not exclude anyone. While talking about Krishna, Swamiji says, “This was the great work of Krishna: to clear our eyes and make us look with broader vision upon humanity in its march upward and onward. His was the first heart that was large enough to see truth in all, his the first lips that uttered beautiful words for each and all.”

Whether management, sociology, self-development, education on each subject Gita has something to tell us. Now a days many such books are also coming in the market. We should try to understand Gita in present context and then pass it on the next generation. They are bound to admire and practice Gita if it is told to them in today's language and paradigms. Our purpose of celebrating Gita Jayanti should be this that the relevance of Gita is understood and explained to the younger generation in today's terminology. That is why since few years we have linked the celebration Gita Jayanti to Kutumba Sammelan as Gita should become the basic book that is read and discussed in the families. Family is a place where children acquire views and values. In moulding the children, the influence of Gita would be most useful, elevating, guiding force not only in their childhood but also later when the parents around. Gita – as a mother would take care of the individual and any collective whole its life. This linking of our children, youth, Karyakarta to Gita is the purpose of celebrating Gita Jayanti.

We can dwell on these points during Gita Jayanti – a) Regular study of Gita. We should take resolve to make a deep contemplative study of Gita. Our function should motivate others to study Gita on regular basis. b) We can focus on life of Sri Krishna and others as given in “Sages of India” c) We can focus on what Swami Vivekananda had told about Gita. For that we can refer the articles Gita II and Gita III in the book ‘Thoughts on Gita’ by Swami Vivekananda.

To conclude in the words of Swami Vivekananda, “May the great Krishna bless us, and lead us all to the fulfillment of our aims.”

With warm regards and prayers.

Yours Sincerely,

B Nivedita
Vice-President