

**Editorial**

**A New Dawn in the Arab World**

The Arab world has taken another great leap forward. The spontaneous uprising of the people against the tyrants that ruled their countries for long is bound to have ripple effects in society as well as in the world of ideas. It paves the way for more profound changes. There have been attempts to violently suppress the unarmed masses, mostly defiant students and youths. But, eventually the rulers of Tunisia and Egypt had to flee. ‘We are in control of our destiny’, exclaimed one protester at Cairo. People’s unrest has become unmanageable in many countries of the Middle East. Swami Vivekananda ‘never doubted that for man, the world over, the coming age would be “for the people”.’

The first step was taken under a great leader of men, Prophet Mohammad, who galvanized the semi-civilized Arab tribes into a powerful nation. He preached the message of equality, which Swami Vivekananda eloquently explained. In America, in course of a lecture on the Prophet, Swamiji discussed on his advent in its historical context: ‘Each great messenger not only creates a new order of things, but is himself the creation of a certain order of things.... It is necessary to understand the surroundings and circumstances into which they come.’ Thus came Mohammad with a great message, which ‘came as a message for the masses.... The first message was equality.... There is one religion – love. No more question of race, colour, or anything else. Join it! That practical quality carried the day.’

Through the passage of time people tend to lose the real spirit that the Prophets bring into play. Swami Vivekananda writes in a letter: ‘...it is not necessary to preach that Ramakrishna Paramahansa was an Incarnation, and things of that sort. He came to do good to the world; not to trumpet his own name – you must always remember this. Disciples pay their whole attention to the preservation of their master's name and throw overboard his teachings; and sectarianism etc., are the result.’

The followers of the Prophet, in general, thus forgot the spirit and stuck to the external things like books, dogmas, and propaganda. So, Swamiji said in that lecture, ‘These great souls are signposts on the way. That is all they are. They say, “Onward, brothers!” We cling to them; we never want to move. We do not want to think; we want others to think for us. The messengers fulfil their mission. They ask to be up and doing. A hundred years later we cling to the message and go to sleep.... The Prophets are the great messengers of light. They are our great teachers, our elder brothers. But we must go our own way!’

That is why the once great Arab race, which made great contributions to the world’s civilization, including *Renaissance* in Europe, is now unable to catch up with the modern world. The magic of black gold – Petrodollar – makes it wealthy. But, in spite of the wealth, the common man is in a pitiable condition in many countries. Ruthless autocratic rulers, backed by Western powers, have been ruling some countries for decades. And priestcraft still holds its sway. They mix up *religion* with *social laws* and invent all sorts of demonic means to indoctrinate innocent youths and oppress the masses and the women.

Swami Vivekananda said in a lecture on ‘Vedanta and Privilege’: ‘There is so much idea of equality, says the priest, that my little privilege will not be detected. So say our rich

men, so say the tyrants of every country.... The cruelty of the fox is much more terrible than the cruelty of the lion. The lion strikes a blow and is quiet for some time afterwards, but the fox, trying persistently to follow his prey, never misses an opportunity. Priestcraft is in its nature cruel and heartless. That is why religion goes down where priestcraft arises. Says the Vedanta, we must give up the idea of privilege, then will religion come. Before that there is no religion at all.' During the last century, the world has come out of the iron grip of priestcraft to a great extent. In this respect, unfortunately, the Middle East and a few other countries have been lagging behind due to many historical reasons.

A great number of internet-savvy, pro-democracy youths at the Tahrir Square of Cairo, of course, belonged to the modern age. Said a 27 year old youth, 'At the end of the day, we are all Egyptians, and boundaries of religion do not define either our lives or our society.' There Christians formed a human chain to protect Muslims when the latter prayed, and the Muslims did the same for Christians. The progressive element has been at work for long and is gaining momentum with the momentous turns of history. One remembers a vision of Swami Akhandananda, a disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, in which he saw Swami Vivekananda after his passing away. Swamiji appeared in the robe of an itinerant Muslim *fakir*. Astonished, Akhandananda asked, 'Swamiji, where are you going?' Swami Vivekananda smilingly raised his hand to point towards the Arab world and said: 'I am going there. No more work was possible with the weak frame of a Bengali. So, now I have to go.'