“Let us at least nurture kindness”
:Harsh Mander

Ida Scudder Humanitarian Oration, 2019

Peace activist and writer, Mr. Harsh Mander, who currently serves as the Director of the Centre for Equity Studies in New Delhi, delivered the 8th Ida S. Scudder Humanitarian Oration on the 9th of August, in the Scudder Auditorium at College Campus.

Mr. Mander resigned from the Indian Administrative Services after the Gujarat riots to work among the homeless. A passionate advocate for the marginalised in our midst, he spoke on the theme of public compassion.

“The example of public compassion which both Dr. Ida Scudder and CMC Vellore provide really represent to me the core – the missing link in finding a way out of the darkness of our times,” he said.

The principal challenges of our time, which he described as one of the most cruel and barbaric in human history, were inequality coupled with indifference, rising hatred and legitimised bigotry, and climate change. In India, caste - the accident of our birth - complicates and deepens inequality and allows us to have a high level of comfort with the glaring inequalities all around us, he said.

Mr. Mander, who played an active role in the debates around the right to food that finally led to the passing of the National Food Security Act in 2013, recounted heart-wrenching
stories of Dalit mothers in UP teaching their children how to sleep hungry and of others who ate undigested grain that they had collected from cattle dung.

He spoke of the rising hate and intolerance all around us, which we hardly notice, that “manifests itself in an epidemic of lynchings”. He recounted, from his personal conversations with the families of victims, the extreme torture involved in these lynchings that frequently last a few hours, and the legitimisation and valorisation of this hatred, as evinced by their video-taping and propagation on social media by the perpetrators themselves.

Even as he spoke of these disturbing events, his confidence in the solution to the problems of our times – meeting hate with radical love and being aware of our duty towards each other – was evident. He reminded the audience that the only thing needed was “to do small things with great love” and to nurture kindness in ourselves and in the hearts of our children (Mother Teresa).

“If India is to be saved, let us at least nurture kindness; let us at most nurture kindness,” said Mr. Mander.

The Oration, jointly organised by Christian Medical College Vellore and the US-based Vellore CMC Foundation, aims to perpetuate the legacy of CMC's founder, Ida Scudder, by honouring individuals who exemplify her courage, compassion, integrity and character, in order to inspire future generations to follow in her footsteps and emulate her dedication to the well-being of humanity.

CMC Director, Dr. J.V. Peter, welcomed the gathering. Chair of the Vellore CMC Foundation, New York, Dr. Philip Ninan, introduced the speaker. Local author Ms. Usha
Jesudasan read the Citation and presented it to Harsh Mander, and Dr. Anna Pulimood, Principal of CMC Vellore proposed the vote of thanks.

Watch the video of the oration