

# Enigma of Inter-faith Harmony

Harmony is about co-existence that means live and let live. It is a way forward towards peace and perhaps prosperity, both urgently required in a world of growing political and economic dissonance.

Inter-faith harmony is a conceivable condition, signifying peaceful co-existence among practitioners of various religious beliefs, aimed at eliminating the possibility of discord, violent or non-violent.

Such a condition calls for a global level of understanding that all religions are mutually acceptable per se in terms of their basic tenets as well as manifestations in human behaviour alongwith all ramifications of traditions and their evolution to the contemporary life.

Despite all pretensions to the contrary, the civilizational development might still be some distance from that level of understanding. Consequently, Inter-faith harmony, in strict sense of the word, continues to elude us as an achievable ideal in the real world of 6 billion people under the available parameters of human thinking. However, this could change, given the will to show respect and consideration for one another. Utopian ideals have indeed led to improvement in the past.

Growing awareness of the ideal of interfaith harmony and the urge for its realisation is valuable. The intensity of this awareness might have of late heightened because of the unprecedented perplexities, crystallising exponentially in the wake of efforts to impose a New World Order, essentially on the economic trajectory. However, it would appear to be steered politically, misguided as it were, in the name of an artificially created condition of religious discord.

The current global phenomena tantamount to placing the cart of changing world order before the artificial horse of Islamic



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extremism as means of implementing the change. The inverted technique might well be causing uncertainties and perplexities for those subjected to the change. It is a case of implementing a desired policy by wrong means. The technique does not seem to be yielding desired results; hence the need to rethink its basic premises.

First of all, the changing world order is being driven by the forces of market economy which stand galvanised by the revolutionary technological changes based on scientific researches of the 20th century in the fields of cyber technology and their effects on the speed of communication.

This has given rise to the urge of establishing world-wide economy of scales by pooling global resources leading to the overarching concept of globalization. Globalization, which is still in progress, has caused fresh strains on developing economies, creating an atmosphere of mistrust, fear and uncertainties. Increasing automation in productive technologies has led to decreasing dependence on manpower resources resulting in massive lay-offs and crisis in job markets.

Understandably, changing market conditions in the wake of revolutionary technologies call for change in thinking patterns to cope with the emerging reality. Those unwilling or reluctant or resisting the change are looked upon as stumbling blocks in the path of required transition. For them time appears to be out of joint. Driven to the wall by the pressures of scientific innovations to cope with the mundane realities, they begin to fear that their spiritual world-view was under jeopardy.

In point of fact, their own earthly existence was endangered. Those steering the scientific revolution are also singled out in terms of the dissidence of their moral and spiritual values, leading to the diversionary tactics that their religion was

in conflict with religions of the developing world, particularly Islam. In reality, scientific advances are even causing dissonance among the spiritual orders of the societies of their origin.

Western advanced world has developed a surfeit of scientific data which appears to be overpowering their own spiritual values, giving rise to the misleading escape or diversion that their besieged spiritual systems were in conflict with the spiritual systems of the developing world with focus on Islam.

In fact, the Western civilisation still appears to be trying hard to adjust their own spiritual values in the light of scientific data pertaining to the available secrets of nature. They tend to reduce tensions between scientific perceptions and religious tenets by subsuming the former under the Creation Plan of the Almighty Creator.

The emerging phenomenon needs to be read in its proper perspective, namely that there is no clash of religions taking place. Only the fresh scientific data, seemingly posing a challenge to all religions, would need to be placed in the context of various spiritual orders.

None-the-less Interfaith harmony contributing to peace and prosperity would continue to remain a desirable objective. For facilitating movement towards the valuable objective, Inter-faith dialogue is being looked upon a possible option.

The dynamics of Inter-faith dialogue are bound to be complex and difficult. Establishing viable and credible platforms for such dialogues is not the only insurmountable problem. Such experiments have been carried out in the past without persuasive reconcilable results. Inter-faith dialogues pertain to intangible matters of beliefs and emotions connected therewith. To create one voice for each faith would imply difficulties verging on the impossible, mainly because of the intra-faith variations.

Ironing out intra-faith variations and differences calls for a subtle methodology rooted in developing fresh and flexible understanding of the basics operating behind each spiritual system and the sanctity attached to them.

Fortunately, over the centuries every spiritual system came to realise the difficulties caused by the multiplicity of dogmas by reducing hard metaphysical assumptions to simpler and more persuasive mystical experiences. This kept the spiritual systems alive, giving hope to their practitioners as well as offering simpler insights into the spiritual enigmas of creation.

Most believers of various religious systems thrive on such simple formulae of mystical perception. The point to note is that most religious systems underwent transformations in their exterior form by developing comprehensible and practicable versions of their substantive and incontrovertible tenets through mystical practices and visions.

In fact, over long periods of thinking decay, various spiritual systems were able to sustain themselves through the organised work of mystics who continued to provide mundane focal points for their practitioners. Historically, Islam, Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism and even Christianity have gone through those dilemmas.

Despite several vicissitudes and political setbacks, Islam managed to survive and even flourish in North Africa, Indo-Pak subcontinent, Central and East Asia and the Middle East mainly due to the binding force of mystical perceptions, generally crystallised by Sufi movements or individual mystical thinkers focused on 'the Creator beyond time and space'.

It is a need of the time to develop and identify mystical interpretations around the true moderate and tolerant message of Islam to be able to emerge as a meaningful voice in the Inter-faith as well as Intra-faith dialogues. The guiding idea is not to tamper with the basic tenets of Islam but to present them in a form wrapped with the message of love, tolerance and moderation, as the Sufis of yore did.

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