

## Communiqué

# Consultation on Inter-religious Cooperation in Asia An Interfaith Endeavor to Learn from Each Other's Wisdom to Live Together

5-10 April 2003  
Parapat, Indonesia

We are 37 participants — Buddhists, Christians, Hindus, Muslims — from 14 Asian countries and other continents. We have come together on 5-10 April 2003 in Parapat, Indonesia, to study the need and possibilities for inter-religious cooperation in Asia. We gather at a tragic moment in which the Iraqi people are being attacked by a coalition of the powerful. We have reached a defining moment in modern history where a clear division of humanity between those who engage in violence and wage wars and the builders of peace has become evident, and the agents of corporate globalization are identified over against the victims of oppression.

Having listened to, discussed and reflected upon reports, analyses, and testimonies from our fellow participants, we would like to send with common voice the following message to our brothers and sisters in Asia and the world.

**1. The present situation.** In sharing our experiences from various parts of Asia, we find many common elements that compel us to work together for inter-religious cooperation. We are disturbed to find religious and ethnic conflict in many parts of Asia. External factors such as the “war on terrorism” have exacerbated the situation of conflict and will continue to do so. Such conflicts seem to have increased in recent decades, often shattering patterns of communal harmony that had existed for centuries. A common factor that underlies these conflicts is when one group seeks to dominate and impose its will on others.

The lack of a functioning democratic process hinders inter-religious cooperation in many places. The concerns of ordinary people are frequently not heard and attended to by those in power. This lack of representation is often compounded by economic disparity, the unjust control of material, financial and intellectual resources in the hands of a few. Globalization of the market economy has widened the gap between rich and poor, which in turn intensifies social conflict.

The increasing prevalence of violence underlines the importance of cooperation across religious lines. We refer not only to communal violence, but also to everyday violence toward those sectors of society least able to defend themselves — women, children, the poor, and ethnic,

linguistic, and religious minorities. There is also violence against nature, a rapacious, selfish exploitation of natural resources that has produced an ecological crisis throughout Asia.

**2. Causes of conflict.** We agree that religion in itself is not the cause of conflict and violence. However, we must face the sad reality that religious identity and emotions are too often manipulated to further the self-centered goals of vested interests. Religion thus gets politicized, instrumentalized by powerful groups and individuals to promote political ambitions and the pursuit and maintenance of power and domination. Attitudes of superiority, whereby religious groups consider themselves better than others, are easily exploited by the unscrupulous to foment unhealthy competition, hatred, injustice and conflict.

**3. Common values.** In this Situation, the bases of inter-religious cooperation must be those religious values that we hold in common. All our religions teach peace, justice, compassion for those who suffer, equality, love, human dignity and solidarity, non-violence, sensitivity to others and the oneness of the human family. We all believe that humanity and nature are interdependent. However, we must humbly acknowledge that our own communities have often failed to be agents of peace and to live according to our shared values. Such a self-critical attitude must be accompanied by a love and renewed commitment to what is best in our own tradition, as well as genuine respect and esteem for the spiritual and humane values enshrined in all religions of the powerful.

The challenge we face is whether we can work together on the basis of these shared values to build more just, peaceful, harmonious and sustainable societies.

**4. Dialogue.** The way to build more godly and humane societies is through dialogue. In dialogue, we come to accept others as they are and to overcome tendencies to view others as enemies to be defeated. In dialogue, we learn that others share with us values and a vision that enable us to cooperate for the good of all. In dialogue, we are able to move beyond narrow confessional goals so that we can turn our attention to the real needs of society and especially the concerns of its weakest and neediest sectors, the marginalized, and the victims of discrimination. In dialogue, we can fight stereotypes and also become the voices of the voiceless whose just demands often go unnoticed in the councils of the powerful.

**5. Recommendations.** Create a continuation committee that would be responsible for initiating and monitoring the following tasks:

1. Form a website with the papers of consultations and other interfaith activities in Asia;
2. Prepare further consultations on gender justice, religious leaders, youth groups and donor organizations;
3. Undertake a research project to examine and evaluate school text books to identify cases of prejudices and stereotyping and to propose educational materials that enhance interfaith respect, harmony and human values;
4. Initiate national training programs, and internship, student exchange and live-in programme aimed for interfaith leadership formation;

5. Form interfaith mediation and reconciliation teams that can intervene in situations of violent conflicts;
6. Encourage and support an Asian Interfaith Day, when interfaith events would be held in each country;
7. Prepare a manual for peace that would highlight the common points among religions, that could be used by groups of ordinary people and get translated into local languages;
8. Create a justice and peace fund for Asia to support local initiative projects focusing on interfaith justice and peace building;
9. Examine the patriarchal theologies, structures and practices of our religions and cultures in order to empower women by developing alternative educational resources for the promotion of equal partnership between women and men;
10. Identify and make better known the existing resources for peace education in Asia and explore the feasibility of an Interfaith Institute for the Study of Peace.

**6. Appeal.** We appeal to the peoples and governments of Asia and the world not to allow their religions to be misused for political power and exploitation of weaker sectors of society. Religion should make an option for the oppressed and marginalized, rather than for the rich and powerful. Religion should be an important resource for peace building and reconciliation. Too often religion is seen as a source of tension and violent conflict in society. We appeal to our fellow believers to live in daily life the values that we profess and in doing so make our religious communities effective agents of peace, justice and harmony in Asia. We are convinced that inter-religious cooperation is the most effective way to change oppressive structures in society and to transform unhealthy cultural attitudes. We have experienced conflicts in the past, sometimes in the very recent past, but we believe that violence is not the way forward. Our appeal is that all religious communities in Asia join hands to make our region one in which our shared values of peace, compassion, justice and harmony truly come to shape and characterize our Asian societies.

## **Global Ecumenical Response to the Challenge of Inter-faith Cooperation**

**by Samuel Kobia**

### **Introduction**

At the center of every major religion is what is believed by the respective followers to be divinely revealed truth. The adherents, and especially the leaders, consider themselves as having a divine mandate, nay a duty to defend the truth. For those who believe in missionary

vocation, like Christians and Muslims, theirs is not only to defend but to perpetuate the gospel and convert others. The encounter between religions is not a simple matter because it is an encounter between truths. The inter-religions relationship therefore is defined not only by how relentlessly one defends their truth but whether one is open to and is prepared to respect the other as they are.

In a world that is becoming increasingly pluralistic, encounter between religions is inevitable. The religious landscape continues to undergo considerable changes. Many people who have had no immediate contacts with people of other religions now find themselves living in multi-faith communities. Mixed marriages are no longer uncommon making multi-faith households a new experience among the younger generation. In the West (Europe and North America) there is a growing familiarity with faiths other than Christianity as more people encounter (and an increasing number recognize) other worshipping communities with long spiritual histories. As Wesley Ariarajah observes all this is leading to "a growing interest on the part of younger generation of Christian 'spiritual seekers' to try out meditation, yoga and the like as supplements to their Christian faith."<sup>1</sup>

One of the features of globalization is the promotion and spread of a universalistic culture (global capitalism) with a huge impact on lives of many around the world. Global capitalism imparts new values that compete with religious-based traditional values. The danger for possible clash between these values is very real. For some thinkers the clash has, in fact, already occurred. Jonathan Sachs argues that "September 11 happened when two universalistic cultures, global capitalism and an extremist form of Islam, each profoundly threatening the other, met and clashed."<sup>2</sup> While this is a strong point I do not consider it to be an evidence of 'clash of civilizations'.

In my brief presentation I will underline three main points which I consider to be important contributions of the ecumenical movement towards inter-religious cooperation. The first point is that one way to avoid conflicts between religions is to provide opportunities and spaces for mutual information and learning. In that respect I consider this consultation on *Inter-Religious Cooperation in Asia*, to be vitally important and timely. Secondly, that maintaining a dynamic inter-religious dialogue is critical to the sustenance of multi-faith knowledge and tolerance. Thirdly we should accept that diversity is not necessarily a source of conflict. Rather there is blessing in diversity. I agree with Sachs when he says that,

"The glory of the created world is its astonishing multiplicity: the thousands of different languages spoken by mankind, the hundreds of faiths, the proliferation of cultures, the sheer variety of the imaginative expressions of human spirit, in most of which, if we listen carefully, we will hear the voice of God telling us something we need to know."<sup>3</sup>

The running theme of my presentation is that the contribution of religion towards the solution of problems facing humanity today will be greater and more meaningful through inter-faith cooperation rather than inter-faith competition.

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<sup>1</sup> Ariarajah, Wesley, *Not Without My Neighbour*, WCC Publications 1999, Geneva, Switzerland, p.20.

<sup>2</sup> Sachs, Jonathan, *The Dignity of Difference*, Continuum Books, London, UK, 2002, p.20.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p.21.

## 1. Dialogue enriches multi-faith living

It was not without reason that God gave us two ears,  
but only one mouth.

Jewish proverb

The above proverb which needs no interpretation reminds us that we are meant to listen twice as much as we are to speak. The more you listen to one another the better you understand one another. "Under-stand" denotes standing under something or somebody - that way you feel the weight of that under which you stand. Inter-faith dialogue therefore is absolutely essential in promoting new understanding between faiths. The purpose of dialogue is to create the spaces and provide opportunities for opening ourselves to each other and thereby learn to appreciate our differences. But appreciation of our differences, important as it is, is not enough. Dialogue should help us to discover what we have in common and how that can lead us to common action to address common problems. Moreover, dialogue has the possibility of giving us the capacity and the willingness to affirm our mutual solidarity in addressing contemporary issues.

Dialogue is a mission faiths should undertake joyfully. However, it can only be sustained and be successful to the degree to which those involved do so with conviction. They should have trust in the purpose, confidence in the process, and faith in the outcome. But one thing is very clear, in our world of today inter-faith dialogue is not only desirable but necessary. Dr. Hans Ucko of the WCC argues that, "our world is interdependent, something which should now prompt people of various faiths to come together, not to unite, not to merge, not to blend, but to affirm our differences, and yet committing ourselves to a new attitude to the other." That should convince the critics that inter-faith dialogue is not syncretism as some might fear. This also means that inter-faith dialogue must be entered into with total mutual transparency and honesty, with no hidden agendas. Nothing could be more undermining and damaging to the success of dialogue than betrayal on the part of any or several of the primary protagonists.

The challenge of inter-faith dialogue has never been more urgent than today. This is so not only because of September 11. September 11 gave greater currency to inter-faith dialogue but the recognition of its import was not lost on the ecumenical multi-faith agenda, especially in the last decade of the twentieth century. From the initiatives taken by WCC office on Inter-Religious Relations and Dialogue (IRRD), Dr. Tarek Mitri identified three concerns which are particularly relevant but not limited to Christian/Muslim dialogue. First is the role of religion in the present conflicts between, and within nations. Are the conflicts religious or otherwise? Sometimes because of the use of religious sentiments and symbols as weapons, the conflicts such as in Bosnia and to some extent Nigeria may appear to be religious when they are actually not. Care ought to be taken by people of faith to safeguard against the misuse and abuse of religion for political ends.

In recent inter-faith consultations organized by IRRD many participants have observed that what is described as a "global war against terrorism" is often used by some regimes as a pretext for further oppressive measures and policies. This, in turn, provokes more violence. The

critique of terrorism, as an intensified form of indiscriminate violence, should not overlook state terror and violence.

Although violent conflicts are mainly caused by political, economic and social factors, for several various reasons they are often made to take a religious and sectarian character and are articulated in religious terms. Among these reasons is the deliberate use of religion by certain powers to serve narrow self-interests and political end. This situation has been reinforced by the "clash of civilizations" theory manipulated by global powers to disguise structural sources of conflict under a cultural and religious mask. In these global and local contexts religion could easily be used to intensify violent conflicts whose real causes have in fact very little or nothing to do with religion. Globalization tends to weaken the nation state. When the latter fails to fulfil its traditional role of meeting the needs of its people very often it resorts to oppressive measures against its citizens.

One way of responding to this problem is that many people fall back on their traditional structures and identities which may extend beyond their national borders. This reinforces a current tendency to globalize conflicts and give them religious character. When conflicts in one place with its specific causes and character is conceived of as a global one dividing people along religious and cultural boundaries, it is likely to spill over into other regions with grave consequences.

The second concern is one related to the issue of human rights. The debate about the universality of human rights, and consequently the universality in their application will continue far into the future. Where does the universality of human rights end, and the particularity starts. Muslim/Christian dialogue should address this concern because it is potentially divisive, especially if either of the partners is stubbornly rigid on the issue of universality and particularism. Dialogue should not be allowed to be adversely affected by diatribe about which of the human rights regimes are universal and otherwise. The indivisible character of human rights must be upheld by both sides.

The third concern is about the future of the world and the role of religions. If there is truth in the general claim that religion will be a determining force in the twenty-first century in international relations, the cooperation between regions should be high up on the agenda of inter-faith dialogue.

### **1. Inter-faith cooperation in overcoming violence**

Violence is another issue whose solutions challenge the faith communities. Increasingly people feel insecure even within the confines of their homes, much less in the communities, in the streets, and in the institutions. When it comes to violence in our communities and in the streets of our cities, people of all faiths are vulnerable. That is what people of Durban, South Africa discovered and almost gave in to communal violence until they found strength in an inter-faith approach. In 1996 Christians, Muslims, Buddhists, Jews, Hindus, Adventists, and adherents of African religions started to work together to fight crime and violence. The initial results have been very promising. They are working on a different approach to community policing (both at conceptual and practical levels) and each faith offers its best in building a culture of peace

through non-violent means. Two examples give a good idea of how the Durban project *Building Peace Through Faith* works.

The Buddhist retreat center in Ixopo offers to many thousands of retreatants of different faiths the study and practice of Buddhist meditation, philosophy, psychology and allied arts and disciplines. Cultivating wisdom and compassion is stressed in the meditations, and so is Buddha's teaching that the nature of reality can only be understood experientially in wholesome, mindful living.

In 1998, a member of Durban's Islamic community was asked to write how Muslim spiritual practice contributes to peace building in Durban. The writer used Ramadan as the basis for showing how Muslim's concept of discipline living is incarnated into compassion and reaching out the needy, especially the poor and the aged. He goes on to explain how this practice "creates a state of peace in Muslims, in itself contributing to happiness and peace in our troubled society."

Those two examples, simple as they are, demonstrate what is possible when people of different faiths work together to deal with common problems in our society. But problem solving is not an end in itself - creating spaces for mutual learning, mutual inspiration, and increase in levels of acceptance, are all part of the outcomes. It is through such multi-faith living and working that we overcome prejudices and misconceptions about one another. Then the otherness of your neighbor ceases to be a mystery and a threat to our persons and lives.

The ongoing prevalence of violence and counter violence, which often affect faith communities, are mostly the product of unequal distribution of power and injustices in political, economical and social conditions, at both the global and the local levels. The WCC October 2002 Christian/Muslim Dialogue Conference stated further that:

"the unconstrained forces of globalization, the widening economic and social gaps and inequalities, lack of real democracy within many countries and, in the context of international relations, double-standards on the part of world powers, the growing pressure on cultural identities due to the continuing process of globalization, the failure of many countries to institutionalize the principle of equal citizenship in their political and social structures, the growing use by international powers of military means to achieve political goals, the denial of the legitimate rights of people under military occupation, such as the Palestinians striving for independence and self-determination, the unconditioned support by the United States of Israeli policies in the occupied Palestinian territories - these and other factors breed common frustration and despair, which in turn feed extremism, militancy and therefore violence."

The participants also observe that what is described as a "global war against terrorism" is often used by some local regimes as a pretext for further oppressive measures and policies. This, in turn, provokes more violence. The critique of terrorism, as an intensified form of indiscriminate violence, should not overlook state terror and violence.

Violence is experienced within concrete situations. Therefore it is contextual. That means when dealing with the role of religion in peaceful resolution of conflicts inter-faith dialogue should not be limited to intellectual and spiritual levels only. According to Tarek Mitri, a renewed dialogue, especially between Christians and Muslims should include at least three tasks.

The first one is to challenge the reality, perception and notion of "bloody borders" among religions. The legacy of Christian crusades and Muslim *jihads* reminds us of the extent to which people of faith could go in defense or furtherance of religion. But that should not mean that religious motives are written on every conflict involving Christian and Muslims. Every effort ought to be made to avoid use or misuse of religion, or religious sentiments and language, to precipitate political conflicts. It is also healthy for Christian and Muslims to find ways of dealing with the legacy of "bloody boarders" if only as a way of showing how not to resolve religions conflicts.

The second task is that of helping the people of faith to avoid exaggerating, or even maximizing, religious and cultural differences, without falling into syncretism or relativism. Dialogue could provide the spaces and motives for healing collective memories and overcoming the temptation of collective amnesia or the fabrication of memories.

Thirdly, a renewed inter-faith dialogue helps us to look afresh at the relationships between religion, society, and the state. The issue of faith and politics cannot be left out of the agenda on dialogue. We need not belabor the fact that concepts and even practice of governance have been informed by religion. Yet in the modern times theocracy can hardly be advocated or convincingly defended as the basis for running the state. On the other hand Christianity cannot be accused of considering religion as entirely spiritual and private affair. Many of treasured social values in our contemporary societies could trace their foundation to religion. That reminds us that the principle of co-citizenship has not been relegated to the dustbin of history with no relevance for modernity. While globalization might seek to reduce human persons to merely consumers, the spirituality in us asserts itself and claims a legitimate place in the affairs of people not only in their private but also societal lives.

For sometime in the past religious tolerance was considered to be sufficient objective of inter-faith dialogue. Today we are challenged to seek higher calling than tolerance. For some religions the realization that the other has a truth different from mine is simply frightening. It could even shake the foundations of those whose religious orientation was that his/her religion had the monopoly of truth. What is the Christian to make of the teaching that Jesus is the way, the truth, and salvation may not be attained otherwise. Yet we must enter dialogue not only because of our differences but in spite of them. For dialogue to be genuine and meaningful, all partners must allow themselves to be vulnerable, even as we must expect that the other provides a chance for me to grow in my own faith and vice versa. A genuine inter-faith dialogue is an affirmation of religious plurality in the light of God's design for humanity.

There is an active discourse on the problem of violence and its legitimation in religious thought and in the practice of religious communities. In the eyes of some Christians, the issue of violence and religion is considered to be too divisive to be dealt with in the framework of a fragile process of building trust and mutual understanding. Implicitly, and sometimes explicitly,



the divergence between Christian and Muslim positions are overstated. Today, the relationship between violence and religion is the object of a renewed attention, directed primarily at the Muslim approach to the problem. In some circles, there seems to be an impatient tendency to look for an explanation of acts of war in the scriptural and canonical foundation or justification of violence. Thus, the non-religious factors determining symbolic and historical violence are not adequately examined, let alone exhausted, before addressing the religious dimension. One example is the way the issue is discussed in reference to the Israeli state violence dispossessing the Palestinians and occupying their land, on one hand, and the violence of Palestinian resistance, on the other hand. The "anatomy" of terrorism is privileged over its "genealogy". When some people hold traditional religious education responsible for spreading a culture of hatred, they fail to see that it is not the traditional religious values that lead people to violence but their loss, without much in counterpart, which explains frustration, grievance and revulsion. Violence cannot be explained by ancestral hatred, for ancestral hatred is reinvented and even fabricated in the context of confrontation and violence.

It is only after examining the root causes of violence in their present reality as well as in their respective histories, that Christians and Muslims can credibly reflect together, and share each other's internal discussions on issues like *jihad*, just war and martyrdom. Thus, dialogue on violence will not be caught in criticising, on one hand, the theological inconsistency of those who consider violence to be legitimate as defensive or as a last resort and, on the other hand, dismissing the pacifist utopia of those who choose to overcome violence through non-violence.

It remains true that the challenge before Christians and Muslims goes beyond these considerations. They need to learn from each other and discover, in local situations and at the world level, ways of holding together, without illusions but not without tensions, striving against injustice and making peace.

Partly because of ecumenism's wider appeal to a greater number of people, and partly because of the general trend towards plural living, a visible change of mentality is taking place among many Christians. There is an increase in the level of genuine acceptance and respect for their other-neighbor. That augurs well for a new approach to the mission of the church. Multi-faith living challenges us to rethink the way we perceive and do mission. The traditional approach, which considers proselytism and conversion as the main purpose of the missionary work, must be rethought.

## **2. Towards a better inter-faith cooperation**

Arguably the last fifty years or so have been a discovery of religious plurality. On the other hand this could easily pass for a truism given that for thousands of years people throughout the world have been living with people of other faiths. While that is the case among the oriental societies, multi-faith living in the West is a much more recent social phenomenon. Western societies have been more or less homogenous but that is no longer so. This has created a reaction in the West, which influences also the character of inter-religious relations. Be that as it may, care should be taken not to buy too easily into a western mindset and framework prompted by the influx of communities belonging to other faiths. The knee-jerk reaction to the "sudden" presence of people of other faiths in Europe and North America is panic. In time this leads to religious xenophobia which may in some instances translate into racism.

It is also safe to assume that the longevity of religious co-existence notwithstanding, our religions are not well-equipped to deal with religious plurality. Christian theology has (as is the case in many other religions) not really taken other religions seriously as significant other. The present set-up of religious plurality will oblige us to rethink who we are and what we teach about others and ourselves.

An African proverb states thus - "if you want to go fast, walk alone; if you want to go far, walk together." The inter-faith movement makes us experience the other in his or her religious tradition. We discover that they also believe or are obedient to a religious tradition. It is different from our faith and our way of belief but there are many commonalities. By walking together, we discover how broad a common ground we cover together; that what should bring us together is more than what separates us. This is critically important for posterity and for a vision of a world of peace, justice, sanctity of life, and dignity of difference. This could also be the basis on which the next generation will see the significance of living a meaningful religious life.

Through the inter-faith movement, we have discovered that "wisdom" is an intrinsic part of many religious traditions and a bridge to getting to know each other better. The Jewish people live in a constant reinterpretation of the one revelation. The Christian Church wrestles with the inter-relationship between Scripture and Tradition. Chinese come out of a Taoist tradition, where dynamic creativity allows nothing but change. The African traditional religion puts highest priority on relational dimension of life - to be is to be in good relationship with the other. "I am because we are, and since we are therefore I am." If we think of wisdom as the deepest human experience, moral discernment, understanding of justice, experiences of how to live with each other and with God, righteousness, the enigma of life and death, the suffering of the innocent, a way of thinking and an attitude to life and the concerns of humankind, then we might be at the source of what it means to be truly human beings trying to understand how we can and need together to look for ways of mending the creation.

The quest for wisdom unites us as human beings facing the same threats, anxieties, fears, joys, pleasures and hopes. The notion of wisdom as it is carried in the person of the sage, the scholar and the saint, wisdom as a contribution to the good society, wisdom in the irrationalities of life. The concept of wisdom allows for seeing the feminine aspect of God: Sophia or Chokmah, wisdom. Wisdom is feminine in so many cultures. Women raise children and bring about the first socialization. The psychological factor is introduced through motherhood. While men had their power in arms, while men were chopping wood, women were creating: making food, making pots, making clothes. The origins of writing are with women, as they had to find a system for bookkeeping and the household account, *oikonomia*. Women have always been the custodian of the cultural memory of the community. Buddhist teachings also describe wisdom as a woman. The Bodhisattva Kwan-yin is portrayed as a woman, full of compassion and mercy. Wisdom is always in the company of compassion, like the two wings of the bird.

One way of discovering each other is in the whole realm of prayer and worship. Praying in the presence of the other affirms our willingness to expose ourselves to mutual vulnerability. It is only before God, the Maker, Creator that all human beings feel free to acknowledge their inadequacies, their fragility, their smallness. Through various forms of inter-religious prayer,

we discover from being related to each other aspects in our own spiritual life that we didn't know of before.

While in talking about "inter-faith co-operation" we must avoid the temptation to be abstract, general and ambiguous, we should, nevertheless, recognize that there are "global" issues that we can and should address together. How can we find common ground to address issues, where, irrespective of our religious traditions, we see a common challenge and understand our common responsibility? People experience across the religious barriers much of the issues that affect human life. There is no particular Christian peace, Muslim environmental policy, etc. A Muslim activist and thinker, invited to the JPIC Convocation in Seoul 1990, properly challenged the convened Christians to realize that not only Christians care for justice, peace and the integrity of creation. Muslims, Jews, Hindus and Buddhists have also contributed to make and could together with Christians strengthen the commitment to peace.

Therefore, the ecumenical movement needs to pioneer the Christian willingness to explore all issues that confront humankind, not in isolation, but in partnership with others. The so-called Lund Principle of Faith & Order in relation to inter-church relations, which states, "that which we can do together we should not do separately", should be broadened to include our relationships and life with people of other religious traditions.

## **Conclusion**

Taking seriously religious plurality is a challenge to the nature and scope of the ecumenical movement. The multi-religious plurality is in many situations and contexts a complex reality, which has prompted the ecumenical movement to begin reflecting in new ways how best to respond and live a relevant ministry. Religious plurality is one facet in the ongoing transformation of the churches today, either as a problem to overcome or a possibility to reckon with. Already in 1980 Wilfred Cantwell Smith complained that the word "ecumenical, that should in reality mean the search for the unity of all humankind, had unfortunately been appropriated lately to designate a rather internal development within the on-going church."<sup>4</sup> The use of "New Ecumenism", "Mega-Ecumenism", "Wider Ecumenism", etc., points to the need for the religious traditions to grow closer together but has not had much welcome. There is a fear that this concept would in the end undermine the Christian search for unity. However, this is not the case. Christians still need to find ways to speak, act and engage together to fulfil their common calling to be Church in the world. Yet, the ecumenical movement can no longer be satisfied with the unity of the church to the exclusion of the search for unity in a wider sense.

The relationship between the two movements needs to be understood and related. In fact, there had been attempts in the past to deal with this question in the Faith and Order studies on "The Unity of the Church and Unity of Humankind." The contemporary religious awareness has gone far beyond the parameters of that study. A new attempt to understand the issues has become urgent. Your contribution towards that end cannot be over emphasized. And that is what makes the findings of this consultation of great value not only just to Asia but to the global ecumenical movement as well.

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<sup>4</sup> Smith, Wilfred Cantwell: "The Christian in a Religiously Plural World" in Jon Hick & Brian Hebblethwaite, (eds.), *Christianity and Other Religions*, Glasgow: Collins, 1980, p.87.

# **Living Our Faith in Community Seeking Justice, Peace and Sustainable Alternatives Together**

**by Thich Gia Quang**

It gives me great pleasure to be here with the participants of the Religions at this Consultation Conference.

I would like to extend to all of you my warmest greetings from Vietnam and my wishes for the success of our conference - the noble mission of seeking justice, peace and sustainable alternatives together.

As a follower of Buddhism, I take Buddhism and his Dhamma as my belief. I understand that our Lord Buddha as well as the Founders of the other religions had experienced many sufferings to bring happiness and find the way of liberation for the People.

Facing the sufferings and miseries that seem endless of human beings, the religion began to appear with the role of the Savior. It is not only a spiritual reliance upon which people come to have comfort when they meet with difficulties, but it also plays an extremely important role in the adjustment of the behaviors of the people. All the tenets and doctrines of all religions lead the people to the truth, the good and the beautiful, and lead the world to peace, justice, prosperity and happiness. Religions lead people to things that they can realize not that they can only admire from far distance and dream of.

In the world today, where hatred, threats and conflicts are prevailing, this role of religions is all the more clearly seem.

As other religions, Buddhism came into being by the foundation of Lord Buddha Sakya Mouni, and have the Dhamma (the Pali term for the doctrine or tenet) and a congregation of monks and nuns (The Sangha).

Buddhism has had great influence on the past, the present and still on the future. Summing up of 45 years of preaching the Dhamma, Lord Buddha did preach only about sufferings and the cessation of sufferings. According to Buddhism causes of all sufferings are craving, anger and ignorance, and war. Peace means the end of suffering. That is why he is called "A Messenger of Peace".

"Anger acts like a tight screw driver that grips at anybody likely to fall under its sway and considered as a destroyer of mankind."

Lord Buddha makes it very clear that with a heart filled with hatred and animosity, such a man can not understand well and speak well. A person who nurtures his displeasure and animosity can not appease his hatred.

Lord Buddha highly appreciated those who live without hatred.

“Happy indeed will be our life  
When we are live without hatred among the hatred  
Among people with hatred  
We live devoid of hatred”

(Dhammapada. 197..)

and

“Hatred will never be appeased by hatred in this  
world. Only with no hatred, Will hatred be appeased.  
This is an eternal law” (Dhp.5)

In a world full of uncertainties, threats, conflicts as nowadays, peace is very frail but it does not mean that it can not be achieved. In the future peace can be sustainable, hatred will be cease, justice will be brought, poverty will be eradicated if human beings know how to stop confronting and to continue dialogue and extend fellowship and mutual understanding to others so as to find a common voice.

To realize these objectives, Buddhism highly upholds these values or virtues as the four Sublime States or Modes of Sublime conduct or Divine Abodes (in Pali: Brahmavihàra). These are loving kindness (metta), compassion (karuna), appreciative joy (mudità) and equanimity (upekkha).

“These virtues tend to elevate man. They make one divine in this life itself. They can transform man into a superman. If all try to cultivate them, irrespective of creed, colour, race or sex the earth can be transformed into a paradise where all can live in perfect peace and harmony as ideal citizens of one world.

The four Sublime virtues are also termed illimitables (appamana). They are so called because they find no barrier or limit and should be extended towards all beings without exception. They embrace all living beings including animals. Irrespective of religions beliefs, one can cultivate these sweet virtues and be a blessing to one self and all others. (Narada)

Among the four noble truths, the Noble Eightfold path, the Fourth Noble Truth is also upheld by Buddhism.

- Right Understanding
- Right Thoughts
- Right Speech
- Right Action
- Right Livelihood
- Right Effort
- Right Mindfulness
- Right Concentration.

All these factors help people have proper awareness towards people and things, and then they will have proper attitudes and behaviors. These are indeed very necessary for the harmony, peace and sustainable development of mankind.

With right understanding and right thoughts, people will see things and man as they really are. Then hatred and conflicts will be ceased. With right speech, right action and right livelihood, people will not do harm to other people, living beings and things. Then they will not destroy and pollute the environment. They will not follow consumptive lifestyles and they will live more simply so that poverty may be alleviated or eradicated.

Right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration will help people have right understanding and right thoughts so that they can develop wisdom and tolerance - the two values so necessary for the world today.

We think these noble ways as well as the six Harmonies (or Six Dhammas first laid down as a code of conduct by Lord Buddha to assure perfect harmony among religious members of his Sangha) can be applied not only by followers of Buddhism, but by all people in general, because in its teaching Buddhism has no features to confine it to any particular nation or any particular country. It is universal in its appeal.

To the Buddhist there is no far or near, no enemy or foreigner, no renegade or untouchable since universal love, realized through understanding, has established the brotherhood of all living beings. A real Buddhist is a citizen of the world.

Some salient characteristics of Buddhism are, therefore, its rationality, practicability, efficacy, non-aggressiveness, harmlessness, tolerance and universality. (Narada)

Not only Buddhism, but also Christianity, Hinduism and Islam all have philosophies full of humanism to lead human beings to the genuine, the good and the beautiful.

In other words, if human beings live a pure life of religion, their lives will become better. Then, why don't we widen the influence of religion to the people of all strata in all nations of the world? The twenty-first century is forecast by the scientists as a century of science, technology and spirituality. This is a joyful sign. The people will have a tendency of orienting toward spirituality and their spiritual life will be developed. These are indeed advantages for each religion to have the plan for its development.

In this Consultation, we hope to seek alternatives for justice, peace and sustainable development for the world. Solutions and alternative can be found, but to implement these solutions requires the impact from various sides. World organizations should promote their roles in the life of the world. The nations, especially leaders of the nations should support and cooperate with each other. Religions should strive together and unite. The youth will be the future of the world, so a set of values which upholds wisdom, loving kindness, tolerance and other noble teachings of all religions should be included into the curriculum of the schools. Gender roles should be emphasized.

We shall strive for a world of justice, peace, and prosperity with sustainable development, democracy and no hatred.

On behalf of myself, a Buddhism monk, I would like to extend to you a message: “For a bright future of the world and of mankind, we should live a pure life, understanding each other so well and extend loving kindness and compassion to others right from today.”

## **A Chinese Christian Woman’s Perspective**

**by Rose Wu**

### **Stolen Heritage**

When I look back at my religious path, I realize that ever since I followed my parents to church when I was 5 years old, the rich and diverse cultural and religious roots which I was supposed to inherit as a Hong Kong-born Chinese woman were gradually stolen. It was stolen because my parents, as well as many converted Chinese Christians, believed that Christianity based on a Western interpretation is a religion of victory and success. It was stolen because colonization brought into being an unequal power structure, reinforced by the ideologies of racial and cultural superiority. As one group of Asian women has noted, “Western colonial culture taught us to accept the colonizers’ superiority as a race and as a culture while denigrating our own as inferior, backward, and primitive.” (EATWOT, 1994)

A consequence of this process of colonization was the export of European languages, religion, literature, and learning to the colonies as part of their “civilizing mission” which involved the suppression of a vast wealth of indigenous cultures beneath the weight of imperial control. Karl Marx commented on this colonial discourse: “They cannot represent themselves; they must be represented.” This has been described by Edward Said as orientalism<sup>1</sup> in his book of the same name which constructs an East/West binary relationship and illustrates how the West defines itself in relation to and by authoring the East as “others” in order to justify Western imperial domination.

Since the collapse of the communist regimes in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe in the late 1980s, the rapid transformation of the world has led to the redrawing of the world map, the re-examining of the legacy of the Cold War, and the revisioning of the world order. Today most of the colonies have gained political independence. However, as we reflect on the present global situation, we know that Western colonialism is still very much alive except that it is now much more subtle; for under the name of “globalisation” or under the flag of “anti-terrorism,” it is much more legitimate. For me, this East/West binary discourse of colonialism is directly linked to the Western construction of civilization, culture, religion, gender, race, and class differences in our contemporary societies.

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<sup>1</sup> By orientalism, Said meant three things: (1) an academic subject; (2) a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction between “the Orient” and “the Occident”; and (3) a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient.

## Journeying Home

I was shocked when I heard some Christians raise a question in a seminar which we organized after the June 4 Massacre in 1989. Although they respected the students who were killed at Tiananmen for their high moral principles, they worried that they would not be saved after they died since most of them were not converted Christians. What saddened me was that Christianity not only stole our Chinese heritage, but it also created alienation among Christians and non-Christians. As Asian feminist theologian Kwok Pui-lan points out, the “master narratives” present the history of the colonized as a mere extension of the colonizers, not only through political and economic domination, but also in the form of a religious narrative.

Theological claims have political consequences. This is particularly true in contemporary Asia where the exclusive claims made by any one particular community of faith affect its relationships with members of other communities of faith. Such claims also raise basic theological questions concerning God’s relationship to the whole of humanity, not just to one stream of it.

For many years, the conversion of “heathens” to Christianity and the spread of Western civilization and values have been interpreted as a universal and exclusive salvation which becomes a justification for enforcing Western superiority over other cultures and religions. I believe that now is the time, in the wake of threats and suffering caused by the war in Iraq and violence elsewhere, that we, coming from different cultural and religious backgrounds, begin journeying home, a home that we dare to press fiercely against the boundaries of isolation and in which we meet each other as friends, a home where we can take seriously the problems of injustice that cause more death and despair. As a Christian, I believe that the fulfilment of righteousness between God and humanity was made incarnate in relationships between and among human beings. I believe that God is with us in this and only world, as a moving spirit, which creates, liberates, and blesses. Spirituality for us begins in the concrete concerns of the everyday struggles of the people.

The future of humanity is not about the question of how we name and describe God; it is about us as we experience God in this world at this time among ourselves.

Where is home for me? After many years of wandering, I am no more a stranger at home. I find my home beyond my Christian lens of truth. I restore my home from my Chinese heritage as well as the human wisdom which we all share.

According to the Tao Teh Ching, the Tao is utterly transcendent and beyond all human depictions, categories, and names, and yet, the Tao is also everywhere:

*The Tao that can be spoken is not the eternal Tao;  
The name that can be named is not the eternal name.  
The nameless was the beginning of heaven and earth;  
The named was the mother of the myriad creatures.*

For Chinese, we accept the reality that it would be impossible for human beings to pray to, relate to, or depict the Tao, Buddha, Heaven, the Way, the Truth as they were in themselves



because any such attempt would inappropriately limit and constrain the vast cosmic reality within a specific set of terms and categories.

Throughout my pilgrimage in Chinese culture and religion, I have been profoundly impressed by the Chinese wisdom for weaving the many paths of the Chinese religious field into a single Way, and yet, all paths are neither final nor definitive but rather are limited by particularity and circumstance. The more I have come to know and celebrate the rich multiplicity of the Chinese cultural and religious fields, the more I have begun to wonder about issues of truth, or as people of the West often tend to construct it, *the truth*. I feel much more at home when I find that the Chinese approach to truth entails humility about the limitations of any single articulation of doctrine and an openness to the fact that truth will never be exhausted as long as human beings live in a world of changing circumstances.

Further wisdom I find from the Chinese approach to religion is the culture of hospitality. Many Chinese religious organizations and people have used the structures of hospitality to accommodate diverse religious deities and adherents within their celebrations. They have embraced or included their neighbours—divine and human—as guests in their appropriate places and roles. This is, in fact, an ancient and virtually universal human strategy for embracing the stranger. The rituals of hospitality and commensality are at the very centre of the human mechanisms for establishing relationships across lines of family, community, culture, and nation.

Let us journey home together. The home belongs to everyone. No one is excluded. This is the home where we all can come and share life together. In this home, we do not need to compete in order to survive. In this home, we do not have to fight in order to proclaim the truth. This is a home where we can seek mutual respect, mutual healing, and mutual sharing.

### **The World in Pain**

The world is our meeting place with God. As we look closely at the present world, we must confess that the world is in pain. The pain is so pervasive and urgent that we are compelled to name its manifestations so that the depth of this pain can be heard.

*Where is the pain?*

The planet is being destroyed. The air, the water, the mountains, the land, the oceans are polluted, so much so that this world is no longer a safe place in which to live.

Children are dying of hunger and violence. Young people are full of despair and anger because of their powerlessness to make changes. The poor and women are excluded from participating in decisions that affect their lives.

The world is in fear. We are in fear of our neighbours! We are in fear of losing security! We are in fear of terrorist attacks! We are in fear of a dangerous virus!

The world is at war. We live in a culture of war in which we believe that the only way to survive is to beat others down. We live in a culture of war in which those who do not agree with

me are my enemies. We live in a culture of war in which we must conquer others in order to be masters of the world. We live in a culture of war in which we believe accumulating wealth means success and poverty is only a natural social phenomenon. We live in a culture of war in which we believe violence is an effective way to stop violence.

The world, as well as Asia, is experiencing a fundamental crisis, a crisis in the global economy, global ecology, and global politics. Hundreds of millions of people in Asia increasingly suffer from unemployment, poverty, hunger, disease, and the destruction of their families. Hope for a lasting peace among nations slips away from us. More and more countries are shaken by corruption in politics and business. It is increasingly difficult to live together peacefully in our cities and villages because of social, racial, ethnic, and religious conflicts. Even neighbours often live in fear of one another.

As religious communities,  
let us confess our abuses of the earth's ecosystems.  
Let us confess our division of humanity.  
Let us confess the poverty that stifles life's potential, the hunger that weakens the human body, the economic disparities that threaten so many families with ruin.  
Let us confess the social disorder of the nations, the disregard for justice which pushes citizens to the margin, the anarchy overtaking our communities, the insane death of children, women, young and old civilians from disease, violence and war. In particular, we confess aggression and hatred in the name of religion.

### **Commitments for Interreligious Cooperation in Asia**

As faith communities, when the present world is sinking in fear, despair and pain, we must try our best to put aside our differences and prejudices toward each other and to search for new ways of cooperation so as to enable us to serve and heal our common home—the world—more effectively, for our different religious and cultural traditions must not prevent our common involvement in opposing all forms of inhumanity and in working for greater solidarity and love among different communities.

I would like to suggest four directions as the basis of our corporate commitment.

#### ***1. Commitment to a Belief in Humanity as One Family***

All human beings are reflections of God's image; we are made for togetherness, not for sameness. In this sense, Christianity, as a historical religion, holds no monopoly on God's truth and salvation. Therefore, there is a need to liberate our Christian theologies from the bondage of a single messianic interpretation of Jesus in a multicontextual and multicultural world.

We should also liberate our concept of God from the absolute "Word" to one who speaks through the "voices" of all created beings. Therefore, we must engage in authentic and non-exploitative dialogue with others whose voices are different. We must hear and respect other religions as "echoes" of sacred voices and engage in coalition and solidarity to enhance the well-being of our individual and communal contexts.

Faith communities consider humankind as one family. Each of us depends on the well-being of the whole. We must not live for ourselves alone but should also serve others. I believe when all faith communities affirm that this world is a gift from God for all of us and that we must treat each other as brothers and sisters we can counter our present deeply broken and divided world with this proclamation of faith, which itself is a strong and powerful statement.

## ***2. Commitment to Building a Just and Caring Economy***

Western Protestantism has much in consonance with the neo-liberal, capitalist spirit. However, in order to transform economic globalisation, we need to have a set of values that questions and opposes the market-based values of globalisation. The challenge then is how do we develop and promote an alternative value system and worldview that will act as a counterweight to neo-liberal values?

There is also a need to evaluate church-state relations in the current context in which governments are increasingly losing their political legitimacy as they serve corporate interests and in which the role of the State has diminished and continues to diminish as a result of neo-liberal policies that place the utmost importance on efficiency. In many of our countries, public goods and services that used to be provided by government have been privatised in the name of efficiency, making these goods and services accessible only to those who can afford to pay. The question is, Where does the responsibility for socio-economic welfare lie?

A just and caring economy ensures the provision of basic needs for all. It is about communities experiencing life together, of relationships, mutuality, and reciprocity. A just and caring economy moves away from values of accumulation and profit to values of redistribution and reparation.

As religious communities, what we share in common is the quest for greater solidarity, love, and justice for the most marginalized people of our communities. We share the value that the economy is organized to serve life. When we see lives are exploited in the name of the market economy, we must cooperate to forge changes and seek alternatives for those who suffer from economic exploitation and oppression.

## ***3. Commitment to a Culture of Non-Violence and Respect for Life***

In order to be a peacemaker in the present world, religious communities must recognize that the international anti-terrorism campaign since Sept. 11, 2001, and the present war against Iraq will not bring peace because they do not address the root causes of violence. In contrast, the global anti-terrorism campaign and the present war against Iraq only deepen the wounds and hatred between the Palestinian, Arab and Muslim communities, on one hand, and the Judeo-Christian world, on the other, creating only inflexible enemies in the process.

To counter the current war and anti-terrorism trend, we must build a stronger movement and encourage interreligious activities for just-peace building, both locally and globally. We also have to learn to embrace our differences and to enter into genuine dialogue with those who are not on our side. In order to achieve this transformation, we must be able to forgive, learning from the dangerous memories of the past. People of different faiths should not allow ourselves

to be enslaved by endless hatred, envy, jealousy, and violence. We must move beyond our religious boundaries and meet people of other faiths. As Martin Buber wrote, “The decisive test of brotherhood [and sisterhood] is not within community but at the boundary between community and community, people and people, church and church, for this is the place where diversity of kind and mind is felt most strongly.”

Today limitless exploitation of the natural foundations of life, ruthless destruction of the biosphere, and militarisation of the cosmos are all outrages. As human beings, we have a special responsibility, especially with a view to future generations, for the Earth and cosmos, for the air, water, and soil. We are all intertwined together in this cosmos, and we are all dependent on each other. Therefore, the dominance of humanity over nature and the cosmos must not be encouraged. Instead, we must cultivate living in harmony with nature and the cosmos.

The advance in modern technology and medicine do not necessarily lead to better health for humanity because our attitude to life cannot be separated from our attitude to health. In the name of modernization and development, the people of Asia, as well as other parts of the world, are putting work and production as the most important values in life. We have no time to rest, no time for fellowship. Under the driving force of production, people gradually become slaves of work. We sacrifice our health, our family, our community, for the sake of work.

To me, the search for the meaning of health is closely connected with the meaning of work and God’s Creation. For Judeo-Christians, the meaning of the Sabbath, far from being regarded by a reluctant people as a day of prohibitions and restraints, has been joyously welcomed as a day of light and rejoicing, a day of celebration of the accomplishment of work, a day of liberation from the worries and troubles of daily life, a day of refreshment to nurture the development of the whole person, a day of real re-creation. It reminds us that life is not only about work and production; it is also about pause, rest, and celebration. It touches the fundamental question of what life is about. What are the important values in human societies besides profits and production. As we seek a new style of life for building the health and wholeness of the community, I suggest that we reflect on the meaning of the Sabbath.

#### ***4. Commitment to a Life of Truthfulness***

In order to resist the dehumanising manipulation by our existing systems, we need to revitalize human freedom and conscience to enable every citizen to learn to resist the system instead of to cope with it. The role of religion is to be a persistent dissenting voice in society so as to try to live honestly and to ask what we think are important values in this human community. The dehumanising factor of living in such a context is that human beings will gradually lose our power and sensitivity of being human. A dehumanised society becomes the norm, or “the truth.”

The Church, in order to live faithfully to the calling of the incarnate Jesus Christ, should allow more freedom to practice our ministry outside of the boundaries of the institutional Church, that is, we should not seek to expand the Church in terms of such institutional settings as more denominations, more local churches, more schools, more social service centres, etc. Rather, we should release more resources and energy to support alternative ministries through actions and community-building. Unless we are free from holding on to institutional power, the Church will not be able to act as an agent to empower the powerless.

As spiritual communities, we are blessed with ancient religious and ethical traditions that teach us to speak and act truthfully. Let us empower each other and constantly serve the truth and live trustworthy lives instead of yielding to an opportunistic accommodation of life.

## **Conclusion**

Lastly, a theology which supports social transformation must discard the individualistic notion of personal salvation because no one will be saved or sanctified unless the whole Creation and God the Creator, Saviour, and Sustainer is saved and sanctified, for in the beginning is the relation. If one part of this body is hurt, we are all hurt, including God. If one part of this body is healed, we are all healed, including God, because our fate is all bound together as one totality of life.

Interreligious cooperation is a commitment of faith in hope. Hope reflects trust in the goodness of a God who listens and responds to our communal lament, which is a true act of repentance and trust. Hope requires us to have faith in “the other” who is larger than the self. Only through our sense of connecting with “the other”—the larger community, nature and God—can we grasp a glimpse of hope for life. To me, this hope is based on our commitment to enter into the communal lament, to repent, and to seek a justice-filled future together as a community.

To end my presentation, I would like to offer a prayer as a sign of our solidarity with the people of Iraq and to ask God to end this insane war. This is a prayer that I wrote for an interfaith candlelight prayer vigil in Hong Kong on March 16.

### *Concluding Prayer: God of Different Names*

God of different names,  
We thank you for the many splendoured varieties of your beautiful Creation.  
We thank you for the many ways you have expressed yourself in human history.  
Forgive our destruction of your Creation,  
our violence toward each other.  
We bring before you the disunity of today’s world,  
the suffering of your broken body.  
This morning we remember before you the country of Iraq—an ancient land of the Middle East,  
realm of the two rivers,  
birthplace of great cities and civilizations—which is now facing  
the horror of war.  
We stand in solidarity—Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims, and Christians as well as those of other  
faiths—to pray for all government leaders to remember  
the tragic loss of life and the suffering that war brings,  
the hatred, the greed and the injustice that war provokes,  
the right of the Iraqi people to determine their own future.  
Grant to all and to our leaders the will for peace and justice.  
Take away our fear and insecurity.  
To you, God of love, we confess;  
To you, God of hope, we weave our dreams;

To you, God of justice, we commit ourselves;  
For you are the God of different names.  
Let us open our hearts to embrace our differences  
as God embraces all as one human family.

## **Fundamentalism and Terrorism**

**by Asghar Ali Engineer**

Fundamentalism and terrorism are widely used term in the media as well as academia. And, more often than not, they are loosely defined terms. Many people describe any thing religious as fundamentalism and any act of killing as terrorism. There is great necessity to define these terms properly and prevent their use in loose sense. In fact the term fundamentalism is hardly applicable to Indian religions on one hand, and to Islam on the other. It is American media which started using 'Islamic fundamentalism' when Islamic revolution was taking place in Iran in late seventies. We hardly see this term in the media or academia before that. Our media also then started using the term and soon it was being very widely used.

The term 'terrorism' too has its origin in American media after 9/11. We have had violence from across the border since nineties of the last century but never used 'terrorist violence' for it. We called it either extremism or militancy. But now call it 'cross border terrorism' after 9/11. Thus it will be seen that American rulers and American media set the term for us to be used.

I would, therefore, like to define these terms though not with academic rigour. We can only try to put some sense in these terms so that we do not confuse them with something else or something not intended. America devises terms to reflect its own interests and not to make any academic sense. We should resist temptation to use the terms loosely.

First, let us try to define fundamentalism. It should not certainly be confused with fundamentals of religion. Even in America this term was not used in that sense in early twenties of last century. In fact those who believed that every word of the Bible is literally divine word were called fundamentalist. One, it did not refer to fundamental teachings of Christianity and second, it was never used in derogatory sense. But now the term is used in derogatory sense and specially 'Islamic fundamentalism'.

As it is used in derogatory sense we must separate it from religion per se. Thus to follow Islam or Hinduism should not be described as 'fundamentalism'. Even to follow orthodox traditions of religion should not be dubbed as 'fundamentalism' though one may not agree with orthodox practices. There are millions of people in every religious tradition who follow these orthodox traditions without being any nuisance to any one in the society. Their practices could be quite harmless.

Thus one must distinguish between orthodoxy and fundamentalism. Fundamentalism in the sense in which it is being used in the media is, in fact, political misuse of religion in a narrow sectarian manner. In this sense there is not much difference between communalism and fundamentalism. Both the phenomena are based on political interests. But still there is subtle difference between the two. While communalism is all about political or economic interests of a particular community, fundamentalism is enforcement of sectarianism with all rigidity for political mobilisation of a community for the power-goals of its elite. Thus while communalism is exploitation of sentiments of a religion based community for a secular goal (i.e. political power) fundamentalism is enforcing narrow sectarian practices for strengthening religious orthodoxy on one hand, and, achieving political power, on the other.

Thus while BJP will be closer to communalism in this sense while the VHP-Bajrang Dal will be closer to fundamentalism. However, it must be said at the same time that the distinction is getting more and more blurred of late as VHP is setting the agenda of the BJP. Similarly the pre-partition Muslim League was closer to communalism and the Jamat-e-Islami was closer to fundamentalism.

Thus communalism is more about secular interests (mainly political) of a religion based community. Fundamentalism, on the other hand, is enforcement of narrow sectarian religion by misusing political power and for political end i.e. with a view to consolidate political power.

Now let us define terrorism. One must admit, while defining terrorism that it is very difficult to reach any consensus about it. Even the UNO failed to evolve one despite great deal of debates. It is often said, and rightly so, that ones terrorist is others freedom fighter. Thus those for Palestinians are freedom fighters, for Israelis they are 'terrorists' to be killed and eliminated. And in Kashmir those who are 'terrorists for us are, for Pakistanis and even for some Kashmiris, are freedom fighters.

The word terrorism is being widely used by the media after 9/11. It was rarely used before. In Kashmir we describe those who use violence as terrorists and no more as extremists or militants, as pointed out before. Again the change of terminology is in keeping with American interests. Though it is difficult to define 'terrorism' those who kill innocent and noncombatant people on large scale could certainly be categorised as terrorist. Many Pakistan-based organisations like fundamentalism should not necessarily and inevitably lead to terrorism, it often does. Fundamentalism, as already pointed out, involves enforcement of narrow sectarian practices using political power and for consolidation of political power - extreme coercion becomes necessary and extreme coercion involves violence.

People do not easily accept such enforcement willingly (except a few) while the authoritarian forces use violence. Also, when it involves political power, political rivalries and secessionist movement violence is inevitably used as democratic alternatives take far too long a time and tries out patience. But it should also be noted that all terrorist movements are not fundamentalist in nature though fundamentalism may also lead to terrorism. For example the LTTE movement is terrorist one but not fundamentalist one.

Another important thing to be noted is that terrorists may use religion or religious terminology like jihad or dharma yuddh or holy war but their objective may have nothing to do with

religious teachings as such. It would, therefore, be wrong to describe a terrorist act as religious terrorism just because of religion of a terrorist and his use of religious terminology. Thus Usama bin Laden being a Muslim his attack on New York twin towers does not become an act of Islamic terrorism'. Unfortunately the media used this term quite unthinkingly.

Usama bin Laden has his own agenda and his ads by no means represent Islamic teachings. No religion in the world, much less Islam, teaches terrorism or inspires any one to kill innocent people. Though some Muslims may have expressed sympathy for Usama (so did some non-Muslims also who resent American policies and its pro-Israeli stance) he never had any official sanction from any Islamic establishment behind him. It is true there is no priesthood or church in Islam and no fatwa, howsoever eminent the institution issuing fatwa be, cannot be binding on any Muslim.

And in case of Usama no such institution has issued any such fatwa supporting his act of terrorism. It is, therefore, not justified at all to describe 9/11 attack by Usama's men as an act of Islamic terrorism. Even if any eminent Mufti (one who issues fatwa) had issued such an opinion it would not have been binding on all Muslims. And in this case no one issued such a fatwa

Usama bin Laden and his al-Qaida organisation does not pretend to have any mass base and in fact no terrorist organisation has any mass base anywhere in the world. It would otherwise seem to be a terrorist organisation. Usama does use Islamic terminology to gain sympathy of Muslim masses but use of such a terminology does not make it an Islamic organisation. It remains basically a terrorist organisation. The religion practised by masses of Muslims is more spiritual than political and religion practised by likes of Usama is more political than spiritual.

The Quran clearly lays down that killing any person without a just cause amounts to killing whole humanity and saving one person's life amounts to saving entire humanity. This is truly humanistic and spiritual dimension of Islam and of any religion for that matter. Killing hundreds of innocent people can not qualify for being a religious act by any stretch of imagination.

In fact whether fundamentalism and terrorism (in the sense in which they have been defined above) are linked together or not both are curses for humanity. No truly religious person should approve of such gross misuse of religion. A religious attitude has to be of humility, distance from political power and of non-violence. The Sufi Islam which was truly spiritual Islam always maintained its distance from power centres and believed in the doctrine of what is called sulh-i-kul i.e. peace with all.

True religion is one, which does not get politicised. Political Islam or political Hinduism became great danger for peace and tranquillity in the society. It is political Hinduism (Hindutva) which caused havoc in Gujarat and many other places and it is political Islam which has resulted in bloodshed in New York or in Kashmir or in Algeria, for that matter. Muslims and Hindus should fight against politicising of their respective religions.



# Looking At The Past – Perspectives on Inter-Religious Cooperation in Asia

by Naeem Shakir

Religion has played a vital role in the history of mankind. The life of an individual and the development of social life have been immensely influenced by religion. In the Middle Ages the religion dominated in the life of man and this era was called the 'Age of Faith'.

In today's highly sophisticated state of development in science and technology, religion continues to guide millions and millions of people of different races and colours all over the world. Its contribution to philosophy, literature, art, architecture, sculptures and music can not be denied. It brings worshipers together and creates discipline and obedience to authority amongst them.

Interestingly, most, rather all religions have emerged from the Asian soil. Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Zoroastrianism and Sikhism belong to the Indian sub-continent whereas Taoism and Confucianism are related to the region of Southeast Asia. And Judaism, Christianity and Islam belong to the Middle East. These are known religions of the world but that is not the end of it. There are many creeds and faiths now which claim to have followers and assert to be recognized and respected in equal measure.

In this modern world, man has attained a sophisticated notion about beliefs and faiths. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948, and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, (both of 1966) have further broadened the vision and the canvass human values. The concept of freedom of conscience has helped in redefining the religion. The religion does not have to be theist or dependant on a god; any sincere belief in ethical qualities as truth, love and beauty are sacred and the advancement of any such belief is the advancement of religion.

Justice Clark of the Supreme Court of United States of America, in a case, United States versus Seager (1965) observed,

“A sincere and meaningful belief, which occupies in the life of its possessor a place parallel to that filled by the God of those admittedly qualifying for exemption on the grounds of religion comes within the statutory definition of religion.”

Thirty five years later, while addressing the Millennium World Peace Summit on 29<sup>th</sup> August 2000, the UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan said, “ the freedom of religion encompasses the fundamental right to worship, to establish and maintain places of worship; to write, publish and teach; to celebrate holidays; to choose their own religious leader; and to communicate to others at home and abroad.” He called on governments to uphold these freedoms, and added: “where

governments and authorities fail to protect these freedoms, it is at once an affront and a menace.”

The religious background of the Asian region that includes the South Asia and Southeast Asia had attuned people of this soil with nature’s peace and harmony. They did not have temples to pray. They worshiped such gods that belonged to different manifestations of nature. But later they formed and built statues to worship. The Mother-Goddess of Indus Valley influenced from Indus Basin to Nile Valley. Hinduism belongs to pre-historical era. It had developed through passage of time to cater for the spiritual needs of the people. The religious hierarchy of this ancient religion gradually dominated the society and in order to maintain its status divided the society in caste system that finally created a wedge amongst different classes of people.

Whereas Buddhism and Jainism belonging to an era of about five centuries before Christ, emerged to again bring humane and all embracing creed amongst the people. Buddha was born in the year 566BC in Lumbini ( Kapilvastu ) in the Himalayan terrain of Nepal. And Vardhaman Mahavira, the founder of Jainism was born in 599BC in Kundagarama ( Bihar ) Hindustan.

And Zoroastrianism ( Mazdayasnm ) emerged from the soil of Iran. Its founder Zarathushtra lived during the years 660-583BC. It again brought man close to nature to bring about harmony in the mankind. The followers of Zoroastrianism are known as Parsis.

Confucianism and Taoism, emerged on the soil of China, again to bring harmony amongst the people and improve notions about life. Though not strictly religions, both have enjoyed following of large humanity. Confucius was born in 551BC in Lu, a city of Shantung, China. He is also called Chines Buddha. And Taoism was led by another Chines philosopher Tao-Tze who was born in Honan (China) in 604BC.

Judaism emerged as a revealed religion from the land of Palestine now a blood drenched soil between Israel and Palestinians. Judaism a religion with God’s message for whole humanity emerged two and half centuries before Christ. It is known as religion of Abraham and Moses. The Old Testament of Holy Bible belongs to Jehovah.

As the mankind had gone astray, the humanity again needed a Savior, therefore Christ was born in the city of Nazareth, again the land of Palestine, the time wherefrom the Georgian Calendar starts. The Christ brought a revealed Word of God through the New Testament of the Holy Book of Bible. Christ brought message of love and peace for humanity. Christianity today has the largest number of followers in the world.

Islam is another revealed religion that emerged from the Arabian soil. The Prophet of Islam, Muhammad was born in Mecca- Saudi Arabia in 570AD. The Quran was revealed to Prophet Muhammad to bring an end to idolatry that had brought ruins to man. Islam stands for “ submission to the will of God.” Islam is the second largest religion of the world. Different versions and interpretations have developed in the Islamic world giving rise to various sects and denominations.

Sikhism also emerged from the Indian soil, Punjab. Guru Nanak, its founder was born in 1469 in Nankana Sahib ( Shiekhupura), now Pakistan. He was influenced by Islam and Hinduism and wanted to bring amity and parity amongst the people of India as they were engaged in sectarian conflicts.

A brief appraisal of the major religions and religious creeds certainly bring one fact at home that all of those were and are for humanity at large. Those are meant to foster love, peace, brotherhood and tolerance amongst different people of the world. We have observed that after intervals may those be long or short, people engaged in different concepts of sins were provided with respite of some religion or some creed of religious nature. The Mughal king Akbar made an historic effort to bring amity amongst Muslims, Hindus and people belonging to other religions of the sub-continent through evolving an all embracing creed which provided safeguards to a pluralistic society that India was.

The role of Bakhti Movement amongst the Hindus was in fact meant to bring equality and brotherhood that was seriously prejudiced due to Hindu caste system which had placed people at different social stations. Likewise the Sufi Movement of the Muslim mystics in the Indian subcontinent is very important as it was meant to bring about peace and equality amongst people at one hand and condemnation of the tyrant rulers on the other. The Sufi thought propagated love, equality, social justice and accountability. They talked about empowerment of the people to bring about a just social order. The results of Bakhti and Sufi movement had immense influence on the Indian society as it taught socio-religious tolerance which was direly needed in that pluralistic society belonging to variety of people of different, faiths, creeds, religions, languages and cultures. That was an era when Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Buddhists, Parsis, Sikhs and people of other religions were living in harmony as a tolerant society.

Nevertheless, whenever and wherever religion was used for the purpose opposed to its inherent spirit of peace, brotherhood and social justice, it not only lost its relevance in the process of social development but its image was also tarnished in the minds of those who were subjected to its abuse. History is replete with events in which the name of religion was used to glorify the deeds and persons of the tyrant rulers. There was a time when State Decrees were accompanied by religious decrees (Fatawas) to silence the subjects and justify obedience.

The Christian and Muslim kings and rulers have been using and abusing religion in their respective dominions. There were bad and sad times when they were engaged in religious wars. The Crusade Wars are unfortunate and tragic remnants of history. Those wars retarded the process of development as religion suffered dogmatism and that arrested the social growth. European leadership at last realized the phenomenon and cause of decay in the society. The society crossed the barriers in development and their struggle brought about radical social change in the form of Industrial Revolution and the French Revolution. It brought a leap forward in industrial and philosophic development as well. The dogmas which were inconsistent with social change were brushed aside by dominant socio-political currents of the new times. The concepts of democracy and social democracy were evolved. The process of polemics brought humanity to new philosophical horizons. And the process of progress marched from egalitarian to socialist society for equal distribution of natural and national resources amongst the people of the land.

After the passage of colonial era for a few centuries, the development and progress of capital and market economy found new markets for their industrial goods through neo-colonial orders and subjected people of the third world to economic and political oppression. A serious threat was felt by Euro-American industry on the emergence of a new socio-economic force that emerged after the October Revolution of 1917. The world community was soon engaged in cold war and was divided into two broad blocks based on economic systems. The cold war cost humanity seriously and heavily. In order to sustain in this cold war, America, the bulwark of capitalism with its allies designed different methodologies to dislodge the new socio-economic power, the Soviet Union which disintegrated as a result of committing major blunders, and finally the military interference in Afghanistan.

During cold war era, as said earlier different methods were adopted to cow down each other which primarily included enhancing of military might and achievements in space field. However, the capitalist world headed by United States of America promoted right-wing religious lobby not only in the Christian world but in Islamic world as well. The reports of the National Council of Churches of United States of America would bear out that in order to create ideological confusions and to blunt socio-political consciousness of the people, especially patronized certain Para-church organizations and charities.

Whereas US in particular and allies in general supported the dictators and military regimes till such time they served them as their lackeys. There is plethora of examples to that effect, however, the name of Gen. Zia ul Haq of Pakistan is important to mention despite tall claims of democratic order, and America has supported kingships in many countries.

During prolonged colonial and later neo-colonial era large section of humanity particularly the third world nations had been subjected to socio-economic and socio-political oppression. A dialectical social change eventually took its own shape giving rise to liberative movements across the world. The October Revolution was a revolt against the oppression of Russian Zar. This ideological political force provided inspiration to liberative forces across the world. The religious liberative movement of the people in the Latin American countries against the economic-political oppression of the imperialist countries influenced the Christian world in evolving theology of liberation. The nationalist liberative movements of the people overthrew the colonial yoke and gained independence in this era.

At the close of cold war the religious lobbies were encouraged to counter the liberative forces. Para-church organizations emerged like mushrooms with evangelical program and like wise non-governmental organizations with agendas of good governance were funded generously. A religious lobby emerged which presented Islam as a third path to socialism and capitalism. This stance not only helped provide conviction in opposing socialist philosophy but also provided an ideological base to imperialism and space for the growth of corporate capital in this region. Fall of Shah of Iran and military dictatorship in Pakistan in the garb of Islamisation of society galvanized this phenomenon. And as result thereof Islamic NGO's emerged on the scene.

The cold war practically terminated at the collapse of Soviet Union. The Afghanistan was the last battlefield in cold war in which United States fought proxy war through Pakistan. This was the time when Pakistan was being ruled by military regime led by Gen. Ziaul Haq that was installed by design. Prior to the military coup of Gen. Zia the establishment had done enough

spadework. The Pakistan Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) had encouraged the Islamic clergy to use the mosque for propaganda on religious lines against the government of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto facilitating military coup.

It was through this military regime of Pakistan that US government was provided ideological and geographical base to wage war against Soviet Union. The Islamic militia was trained by ISI and generously funded by US and the Saudi Arabian agency to undo the Saur Revolution and to contain socialism in the name of religion. Those who were fighting this proxy war were given the name of Mujahdeens who were supposedly doing jihad- the holy war as ordained by Allah in Islam. The Afghan-Soviet war gained immense importance for U.S. as she wanted to punish and destroy the Soviet Union. The al-Qaida leadership was engaged and trained by America to fight a holy war against Soviet soldiers. This was the time when seeds of terror and fundamentalism were sown in this region. Kabul fell to Mujahideens after having ousted Najibullah government in April 1992.

These Mujahideens were later termed as Taliban who had gained governmental power in Afghanistan. The Afghan government was headed by Mulla Omer and Osama bin Ladin, the mastermind of terror networks and an Islamic Mujahid was in Afghanistan as guest of Taliban government. But now the tables had turned against America as 'they wanted to free the Muslim world'. The Taliban established crude and medieval face of jihad in Afghanistan. They had practically enslaved their women folks by restricting them within the four walls of house. The Taliban played havoc with the Afghan society. In their fervor to Islamise every thing they even destroyed the peaceful age-old statues of Buddha. The whole world cried over the damage done to the cultural heritage but their religious bigotry did not respect the world opinion.

They had been provided military training by the ISI, an agency of the Pakistan establishment and developed by the Muslim clergy in Islamic seminaries. The country mosques resounded with calls of jihad. The religio-political lobby flourished from the pulpit, as the mosque became life center for those who were engaged in holy war. Islamic militia groups emerged like mushroom and their presence could be felt in every nook and corner of the country. The Taliban were prepared and groomed in Pakistan and sent to Afghanistan. The Islamic seminaries (Madrassas) in Pakistan attracted faithful across the world.

The specter of Islamic fundamentalism hovered over the Pakistan society. The religious minorities and women were rendered further marginalised. Islamic Shariah was imposed even on those who did not belong to it. It became difficult to live in that suffocating atmosphere. The religious extremists posed threat to private life of the citizens in application of Shariah. And this threat later became one of the causes of exodus for large number of people including religious minorities to America and Europe and other parts of the world. The religious fundamentalists masquerading in the name of Islam killed Muslim brethren of opposite Islamic sect as their enemies. The killers did not even spare the worshipers of other sect while praying in mosques and immam bargahs (of Shia Sect). The non-Muslims including Ahmedies had to pay bigger price and bore the brunt hardly as they were subjected to religious persecution under blasphemy law. The churches and other places of worship were torched and worshipers killed.

The terror network of Muslim fundamentalists spread in whole of the world especially Asia, America and Europe. The volume and might of this network was exposed when on historic

September 11, 2001, the twin towers of World Trade Center in New York and Pentagon building in Washington were attacked by Al-Qaida's zealots killing more than five thousand people in spur of a moment. The terror attacks shook America and its citizens. The attacks were symbolic against the military and economic might of the United States of America. The American nation suffered trauma of being injured and humiliated. America therefore declared war against terror. And resultantly waged war against Afghanistan to break al-Qaida network and capture their leader, Osama bin Ladin. Afghanistan was grounded with American Daisy Cutters. Taliban were ousted and a government led by Hamid Karzai (A business executive of an American Oil Company) was installed. Osama and Omer, however, could not be captured in this war against terrorism where sophisticated weaponry was ruthlessly used.

As a black lash to the ouster of theocratic government of Muslim fundamentalists and war against terrorism which was being waged without known geographical frontiers the people of the whole world had the taste of this pill i.e, religious extremism and terrorism. Terrorist attacks were launched in different parts of the world to send message of hate, dejection, and violence and of course liberation.

In October, 2002, a jihad operation was launched in Southeast Asia by Islamic fundamentalists when a club of Bali in Indonesia was attacked killing 180 people of different nations and particularly of Australia. This terrorist attack once again sent waves of terror across the world. The confessions of two Bali bombers speak volumes for the hatred they have against the West and their links with Osama bin Ladin.

In early 2002 in Moscow, the Islamic militants of Chechenya attacked a Russian theater full of thousands of people in which hundreds of innocent people were killed.

There has been a growing wave of terrorism, religious intolerance and sectarian violence in India. The Hindu fundamentalists under the Bharatiya Janta Party –BJP, are playing havoc with the Indian society that had enjoyed a secular character of the State at one time. The RSS (Rashtriya Sawayamsevek Sangh), VHP Vishva Hindu Parshad claim Hindu revivalist trend to establish Hindutva which practically mean a theocratic Hindu State. This religious militant trend has subjected the religious minorities of India to religious persecution. They have torched churches and mosques killing hundreds of innocents Christians and Muslims. The Dalits are already very hard hit because of caste system. As opposed to legislation the Dalits are practically treated as untouchables. The demolition of Babri Mosque at the hands of Hindu fundamentalists has brought a bad name to Indian nation. And recent mass killing in Gujrat, when Hindu militants torched Muslim villages and burnt people alive again sent a wave of terror to the global civil society.

Religious extremism breeds sectarian violence and intolerance. Rigidity and dogmatism in religion or any other creed tantamount to a fundamentalist approach. And fundamentalism generates hate and terrorism. The people are afraid of fundamentalists because of the following reasons.

- i. They refuse to accept logic and reason. They employ sentiments and emotions to project and promote their creed.

- ii. They claim that their creed is the only truth, therefore, it must be respected by all and none should dare to criticize it;
- iii. They assert that they are on the right and their creed is the real truth, therefore one who does not accept their creed as the only truth is in fact against the truth and he is a liar and their enemy;
- iv. They hold that their enemy is liable to be killed and thus a fatawa (religious decree) is issued to kill the opponent so that heavens may be won;
- v. They maintain that democracy is satanic ideology and so are its institutions;
- vi. They refuse to accept the principle of equality amongst human beings as those are split in two kinds, believers and non-believers and cannot be placed at equal footing;
- vii. They oppose gender equality because to them women were created weaker partners as they lacked wisdom and strength and thus talking about equality between men and women is heresy.

Therefore, they become the sole interpreters of the divine Word. They sit in judgement to become sole arbiters to proclaim what is good and what is evil. Therefore the fears the people about them are not unfounded as they are opposed to a democratic order and pose serious threat to human rights and a civil society.

The misuse of religion in politics has already caused serious damaged to the society. The sectarian conflicts have promoted backwardness, obscurantism and fundamentalism but have also generated the sentiment of hate, intolerance and violence. How the religious militants brazen facedly claim responsibility of massacre of innocent lives the following morning is really shameful and disgusting. They are killing humanity in the name of religion- in the name of God. Do they really win heavens by such acts of terrorism? No, certainly not. They are in fact inviting the divine wrath.

Therefore the world community especially the Asian society is caught up in a situation which is certainly grave and must be addressed in all sincerity. A collective effort is immediately required as the cause of humanity is at stake. The policy of appeasement of theocratic elements adopted by different governments by way of adhocism must be dropped. The progressive and democratic forces must play their historic role by forging unity amongst their ranks in order to launch liberation movement and salvage the people as otherwise the specter of fundamentalism will sap the very vitals of our society. And the vested interest would continue exploiting this situation to promote their oppressive structures.

*Wherefore, what is it to be done?*

The dialogue in fact has become imperative to save humanity and to build and safeguard civil society. A stage has arrived where dialogue must be initiated in an honest and courageous manner to face realities. It has to be meaningful as any formal or cosmetic treatment would be dishonesty and an exercise in futility.

The dialogue becomes media to bring people to gather on common issues. The commonalties of issues have to be sought. The commonalties of issues emerge from the people's issues in a given situation. This dialogue must be in an atmosphere of harmony. None of the two participants should be driven in a situation to defend oneself for continuation of dialogue. None should remain under fear of being accused of something, which is essential for the smooth flow of

dialogue. An atmosphere in a dialogue must be there wherein the right to agree or disagree exists. Refusal to accord right to disagree manifests an order, set up, culture and an approach that is not just.

The concept of unity in diversity should be appreciated and accepted. The unity in diversity is a principle of nature. It is humanity. Therefore diversity in thoughts, notions, ideas, creeds and cultures must not be a source of alarm, fear or misunderstanding. The identities of persons engaged in dialogue must not be disturbed or challenged rather should be welcomed.

Therefore dialogue has to be in a given context, the context of socio-political and socio-economic structures and socio-cultural situation. Therefore dialogue would emerge in those particular structures and cultures. If we extend this dialogue at regional level it emerges in Asia. The Asian reality must be accepted and its issues must be addressed. The dialogue is required as the people need it. This in fact is a contextual compulsion. The people of Asia must adopt a joint action for liberation through dialogue and regional cooperation in economic and political fields. This approach however can not be adopted through dogma or through taking strong position over non-issues. Dogma does not provide or create commonalities as it gives birth to orthodoxy and bigotry.

Unfortunately, the priestly class that includes Bhagat, Maulvi, Monk and Padri dogmatise liberation. It talks about pious acts and deeds but does not talk about structural evils. It does not talk about price hike, unemployment and economic recession. This approach blunts the social consciousness of the people as it domesticates them.

In Asia, the mission model of religion will have to be changed. The conventional model is conversion model. It is out dated. This model is oppressive and repressive. It promotes sectarianism, violence and fundamentalism. The new Asian model has to be devised, the liberation model, the model of Good News, the model of Salvation from structural oppression. This model is sharing, service, justice tolerance, human rights, love and peace and of course humanity.

The dehumanizing situation arising out of tyranny and oppression ends finally as a prophet is born to save humanity. The prophet, however, is not born out of structure. It is the clergy who belongs to structure. The kingship and priesthood kill the prophet. Prophet generates movement-people's movement. Whereas institutions and structures silence peoples movements.

It would not be out of place to mention here that it was through historic dialogue for conflict resolution that in 1985 the two leaders, the President Ronald Reagon of US and President Mikhael Gorbachev of Soviet Union met in Ice Land's capital Rig Jevok and decided not to use nuclear bomb. And like wise, the Paris Declaration of November 20,1990, was made on a dialogue table by 34 countries to bring a formal end to Cold War. Asian people have some long-standing irritants that have heavily militarized the region and humanity has grossly suffered i.e., Palestine and Kashmir. These irritants should be removed through dialogue instead of blood shed.

The issue of peace is common to all people may those be of Asia, Middle East, Europe, America, Latin America, Africa, and Australia. In this current and tragic situation of war against



Iraq, the people across the world have made it abundantly clear that they are vehemently against war and are for establishment of peace through out the world. Millions and millions of people are staging peace march in their respective countries against the naked aggression of US and its small number of allies. Peace is common issue for the humanity for which the whole world through different reflections of dialogue have come forward to out rightly condemn and put up resistance against the mad race led by US President George W Bush and British Prime Minister Tony Blair to capture Iraqi oil fields. The American administration wants to establish and consolidate its unipolar authority by physically stationing itself in the Middle East. It's physical presence in Central Asia through invading Afghanistan under the garb of war against terror is already sending messages of evil designs to control rich natural resources of the region. American war against Iraq is not to liberate Iraqi people or to over throw Saddam Hussian government but to install and establish structure of evil and oppression which is Corporate Globalization, WTO, WB and IMF.

The mammoth gatherings of peace marchers in London, Rome, Barcelona, Paris, New York, Washington and Sydney and every where in the world has put the brazen faced war mongers on defensive and their apologies and explanation for treacherous bombing and air attacks on civilian population of Iraq are shallow and without any substance. John Pilger of Australia while addressing a huge rally of peace march in Sydney on February 15,2003, posed a very pertinent question, “ Why it is wrong to kill innocent people if you are Saddam Hussain and right to kill innocent people if you are Bush, Blair, Howard or Murdoch.”

Therefore peace marchers of the world including Asia must get united and firm to establish world peace and undo all unjust and oppressive structures through their meaningful dialogue for building a tolerant civilized, democratic and just society which objective can not be attained unless our people turn out through their struggle as a dominant political force.

## **Women and Peace Building – Community Development Perspectives**

**by Raja Rajeswari**

“We came together to supplement our families’ income, while earning some money we have overcome our communal and caste differences, and joined our hands to deal with conflict that came in our way and we dealt it!” - a resident of Shankernager slum – Hyderabad, India”

This paper explains how community development programmes could contribute to build peace in the society and also highlights the case examples, learning’s experiences of other women activists for grass root peace building and finally the challenges of working for such initiatives.

Communal riots<sup>1</sup> in modern Hyderabad<sup>2</sup> India go back to 1938<sup>3</sup>. Since then periodic episodes of communal violence have left a climate of mistrust and fear among Hindus and Muslims, especially in those places where both communities reside together. Disparities have become wider and wider, drawing lines between the communities and leading to misunderstanding and broken relationships. This tension erupts from time to time in communal clashes, which result in loss of human life, loss of property and loss of social harmony.

Henry Martyn Institute (HMI) based in Hyderabad, India, since 1969, promotes reconciliation between people of different faiths and cultures. It encourages the study of religions, the practices of religious communities, and practical grassroot involvement with the objective of improving relationships between divided groups and communities. HMI achieves its goals through a variety of academic and community-based programmes.

1990 communal violence caused severe loss physically, mentally and psychologically to the people. HMI became aware of the need for rehabilitation and relief work as an immediate intervention, and creating spaces for healing and restoration of relationships as a long-term measure contributing towards peace. HMI intervened to bring people together from different communities in localities where it really mattered, especially in those places where Hindus and Muslims live together. HMI catalyzed a group of people to come together as the Aman Shanti<sup>4</sup> Forum to carry out the rehabilitation and healing process. The Forum also sought to identify causes of the violence. Initially the Forum responded to immediate relief needs, and worked as partners with like minded NGOs. They found that involved high level politicians who aimed to disrupt order and discredit the state government. Under the cover of the riots, vendettas and matters of personal conflict over business, and other matters were also carried out.<sup>5</sup> From this turning point, HMI began to act as a catalyzing force in bringing together people from divided communities in Hyderabad's Old City<sup>6</sup>. In 1996, on Mahatma Gandhi's birthday, HMI laid the foundation of its grassroot community development work in Sultan Shahi, one of the most prominent areas known for violence in the Old City. It was among the worst affected areas during the 1990 communal violence. In 2000 HMI started a similar project in another Hyderabad locality, Shankernager, a slum with wide caste disparities. These projects are called as Aman Shanti community centres.

HMI's Community Development programmes "involve in grassroots work for improving the quality of life based on the expressed local needs with the local participation and leadership, through this empowerment it aims to bring in attitudinal changes in the mindsets, broaden people's thinking to build a peaceful society." Though the core aim of HMI is to establish peace and communal harmony, HMI believes that before peace building, economic needs and

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<sup>1</sup> Communal riot between two religious communities is most violent and most virulent. Usually religious sentiments are used to trigger violence by vested interest.

<sup>2</sup> Hyderabad is a centre of Islamic culture. It is also unique among the southern cities of India in that Urdu is one of the major languages spoken. It is India's fifth-largest city founded in 1590 by Muhammad Quli Qutb Shah

<sup>3</sup> See Abraham Pediny's research on "Communal riots in Hyderabad. He conducted a study on history of communal riots in modern Hyderabad conducted in the year 1998.

<sup>4</sup> Aman and Shanti are words, which in Urdu and Hindi respectively mean peace.

<sup>5</sup> "HMI: A Ministry of Reconciliation" as quoted in *Interaction*, A Newsletter of the Henry Martyn Institute, pg.1 Vol.13, no.2, 1990.

<sup>6</sup> Hyderabad is divided into the old and new city. The Musi River marks the beginning of the Old City of Hyderabad, with its impressive Islamic monuments and it still retains much of its 19<sup>th</sup> century atmosphere.

personal security should be addressed, because it is important that economic, social, cultural and political empowerment is essential part of the process of building a sustainable peace. HMI's peace building initiatives are focussed towards women who are active agents of peace-building and conflict resolution at local levels. This is an agreed fact by the like-minded NGOs working for peace initiatives. HMI also focuses on children and young men.

HMI's foundational principles which are at the base of the Aman Shanti Centers are: <sup>7</sup>

- 1) development work, if done intentionally, can be a means through which communities come together, building trust through relationship; and
- 2) using an empowering process of working with a community strengthens leadership, resulting in people's greater confidence to deal with challenges, taking action which makes a difference locally.

Activities at HMI's two development projects include:

**Women's unit:** Structured classes for tailoring which give women useful skills as well as additional information which builds confidence, leadership and communal harmony. The intention is that these women share their increased awareness on health, day to day news, issues related to women, communal situations, etc, with their families and their neighbors.

**School:** Educational centers are where our future citizens are shaped. The school especially caters to dropouts or other young children who are unable to attend school for various reasons. While imparting education, HMI consciously work to implant positive thoughts about fellow beings through playful methods and advanced teaching techniques.

**Health clinic:** Catering to the health needs and health education of the community remains the main focus with HMI's clinic activities.

**Literacy programs and reading room sessions:** These programs were started with the intention of equipping people with the knowledge and skills that would help them to grow as leaders.

**Self-employment and income generation program:** Women together started these programs for their economic independence. Working together not only has helped them to achieve this it also has led to friendships and empowered attitudes.

**Micro-credit program:** Small saving scheme started by the women's unit for the purchase of sewing machines. The local leadership runs the programs right from deciding to who gets a loan to the mode of repayment, etc.

In the process of women working together for the community's felt needs, social worker creates common platforms. Within communities these very factors like working together for a common benefit creates trust and relationship, platforms that enable sharing of information, and ideas

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<sup>7</sup> see HMI "Annual Report" 2001-2002, pg. 7

views and opinions. The moment a community feels that an issue is important, everyone gets to know about it. And everyone has something to say. It is only when the community feels strongly about an issue that a dialogue begins. It is only after they argue, debate, fight and discuss that solutions begin to come to the fore.<sup>8</sup> Social worker plays a crucial role to bring community to this stage, this is a process, which involves various steps and Social worker acts as enabler throughout this process.

An initial step is motivating the community to participate in the programs for fulfilling their needs. Later this togetherness, either to learn a craft or fulfil a need unconsciously leads to the solidarity and develops leadership skills among the women. This comes through a greater commitment and investment of work that obliges women to leave the home and participate in collective processes that were unknown to them or previously conducted by men. When women has reached this stage, an initial steps towards peace-building is empowering women by providing information about various issues: social, economic, health, hygiene, adult education, the political scenario, communal violence, caste issues, etc. This information is communicated deliberately to empower them. This is a conscious development strategy that uses two-way communication that could reveal people's underlying attitudes and traditional wisdom, help people to adapt their views and acquire new knowledge and skills, and spread new social messages to a larger audience.<sup>9</sup>

HMI's practical work to bring Hindus and Muslims together for an interfaith dialogue has created platforms through humanitarian and development programs. The concern is to allow a space where people from both communities can voice out their issues and together clarify their misconceptions and develop new understandings. Close observation both at Sultan Shahi and Shankernager Centers gives a sense proved that the programs are going in the right direction spreading a peace messages. One example is how community women have contributed to peace building initiatives in their locality.

### **Local people seeking solutions - Sultan Shahi**

On 27<sup>th</sup> February 2002, in Gujarat State, 26 women, 19 men and 12 children were burnt alive in a railway compartment at Godhra station. Reports say that the tragedy was started by provocative behavior by *kar sevaks*, (volunteers involved in rebuilding temple at Ayodhya) who allegedly beat and threatened Muslim passengers, insisting that they chant "Jai Shree Ram"(praising God in a Hindu fashion). They even unveiled Muslim women. After the burning of the train and the tragic death of innocents, 16 out of 24 districts of the state were engulfed in organized mob attacks, especially on women. The violence and unrest continued until mid-March. Even now nearly eight months later and incidents of violence are reported in Gujarat.<sup>10</sup> The on-going violence and mindless killings have shattered the nation and caused rifts in relationship between Hindu and Muslim communities. The effects of these events were also felt in the Old City Hyderabad with the rise in tension levels.

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<sup>8</sup> Dossier, *Women living under Muslim laws* vol. XIV No.1 March 2002 ,Pg.no.12

<sup>9</sup> Manjula. Communication for development, *Humanscape* Vol.IX issue IX sep'02 by Pg. No.5 She quoted example as how communication helps to leadership and empowerment.

<sup>10</sup> Genocide, Gujarat 2002, *Communalism Combat.*, March-April 2002. This is a fact-finding report on Gujarat Violence.

Panic simmered in various areas of the Old City as people responded with fear, celebration and anger to the horrific violence in Gujarat and the Vishwa Hindu Parishad's<sup>11</sup> announcement of a puja (a Sanskrit word which means worshipping or offering prayers) for a temple at Ayodhya. Schools and centres wore deserted looks as parents kept children at home, or even packed up belongings and moved out of highly volatile areas like Sultan Shahi. There were minor incidents of stone pelting in Sultan Shahi, and a small fire was contained near a temple. People had many stories about how the latter episode started, although there was no agreed-upon conclusion. It is noteworthy, however, that the incident was quickly contained by local Hindu and Muslim leaders who saw that a door was built to protect the entry point to the temple, and by local police who kept a visible presence at the site for a number of days. The Centre staff visited different homes in the locality and surrounding areas, sharing information and listening to comments and fears. About thirty women assembled at the Centre to plan strategies to protect their homes and families. After lengthy and at times heated discussion, including clarifying certain rumours, the women agreed that they would each keep watch in their own lanes, encourage men in their families not to participate in or add to any tensions, and be a visible presence in their lanes immediately after the Friday congregational prayers, one of the times when outsiders have triggered incidents of violence in the locality in the past.

The choice to be a visible presence keeping watch is a new development for Sultan Shahi women. The strategy reflects the feeling by some residents that they can actively contribute to what happens—or doesn't happen—in their neighborhoods. This sense of greater ownership became especially clear when a collaborating organization requested help from our Centre.

Another NGO working for peace-keeping asked Aman Shanti staff to send women volunteers to help form a human chain for peace near the *Mecca masjid* (the major Old City mosque) following the Friday afternoon prayers. The staff and other local women considered this invitation but decided that Sultan Shahi was their first priority: “There will be many people at Mecca masjid for security purposes and if we also join them then there can be no problem. But if we return and find that Sultan Shahi has problems, then we cannot handle them.” Thus the women unanimously decided to stay and be vigilant in their own neighbourhood.<sup>12</sup>

This choice woman made to prevent violence in their neighborhood is remarkable. Here it is important to mention that this strong urge to safeguard the locality and positive thinking to do materialize their ideas cannot be achieved over night. But it is possible with years of slow and steady efforts.<sup>13</sup>

### **Together we are strong – Shankernager**

Shankernager women's income generation unit was started by a group of 28 women to supplement their families' incomes. Women decided to learn the manufacturing of household cleaning products since they thought these are marketable products which are regularly used within the locality. The programme started with good team spirit and leadership, and the women were glad they were able to contribute to their families in a small way. However there was a lot of resistance with one a neighbor: a police constable living besides the Centre. He objected to

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<sup>11</sup> A religious body working to safe guard the sentiments of Hinduism.

<sup>12</sup> See HMI Annual Report 2001-2002 pg.8

<sup>13</sup> Women and peacebuilding by Dyan E. Maurana and Susan R. Ms.Kay International centre for Human Rights and Democratic Development. pg.32. similar peace initiatives was taken during the South Sudan Independence Movement.

the production of chemical products, he claimed that the strong odour was causing harm to the health of his family members. And he strongly felt that income generation activity should not function in this premise. The HMI Social worker along with the local women had an argument with him explaining the focus of the work but the person argued irrationally and did not give a chance to the group to explain.

After this incident the women sat together and discussed among themselves about how the person is troublesome in the locality, and his unpleasant nature of victimizing women. Women narrated several stories and incidents of misuse of his power as a police constable. Women clearly felt scared to take action against him. They all felt that he was capable of doing anything against them.

After a week, the women continued their manufacturing. The constable again had an argument and threatened the women that he would throw out the products or burn them. He abused them in foul language. Women took their material to another place and finished manufacturing and for the time being they stopped production. But they felt very offended and all strongly wanted to lodge a complaint against him at the police station.

After a series of meetings regarding this issue, the women felt that giving the man a private warning through his higher ups would be very helpful. But again the women thought that threats do not help. Being psychologically upset about losing face in the locality he might respond worse. The women felt such action would be more of a provocation to him. So they decided to remain calm and give him time to develop insight and understand the facts behind their efforts. And so the women continued to work.

Once again when the women were working the constable came along with a local leader to hinder the work. Women acted very tactfully and took this occasion to coolly explain the benefits of the programme and the importance of his valuable cooperation to make this project a success. They discreetly pointed out as how neighboring localities would look down on them for the lack of cooperation within the neighborhood. Once the constable was made to feel important and told that his contributions in the programme are valuable, he cooled down. Then discussion then become more meaningful, women expressing their concerns about health hazards, and the need for a bigger place, the need for resources, and the importance of their support. Then the local leader and the constable assured the women that they would find a government place for the households production. The constable expressed his apologies for being rude and said that the women should to continue their work in the present location till they find a suitable place to manufacture the products. Then he left appreciating the programme and the women for their keen interest to support themselves and their families.

This man is now one of the trustworthy persons whom the women contact for help. They gave the person got enough time to reflect on the situation; as a result of his reflections, he is back as a more understanding and helpful person. The local women felt that this is the right way to handle him. As a social worker I had several thoughts about to handling the situation, but the choices the women made were most practical. Whenever the women recall the situation, they feel proud that they have handled it in a better way.

## Learnings

With reference to the previous stories, women succeeded in not only eliminating a source of conflict in the community, but also increasing their own sense of solidarity in the process. They gained a sense of empowerment from having successfully resolved a problem themselves. Now each time women are handling issues-be that a husband and wife problem, or neighborhood problems-they feel that the situations are handled better than before. Changes in their attitude, leadership qualities they have developed, confidence that they are able to make difference by contributing to their families' income, and helping each others needs could be achieved only through long-term investment of time and conscious efforts to help them think together. Success in the above intervention lies in the holistic nature of dealing with a problem, which brought a chain effect. This experience also left us insight that peace building is a process by itself and not a product that could be measured in the terms of quantity. The above experiences also proved that women are mentally strong enough to influence the community through a mild and non-violent method.

In this context I want support my learnings with the experiences of Vietnam women's non-violent activities to prevent violence. Women opine that resolution of disputes and the prevention of violent behavior, as well as efforts to ease the psychological burden of the people through counseling, magazine columns, confidential talks and measures to address economic tension have affirmed women's non violent activities in prevention of violence in Vietnam.<sup>14</sup>

Women in Vietnam consider "conciliation as one of the most important effective means for limiting violence towards women" and feel that conciliation measure is not abolition of struggle or a tactic to compel women to show self-effacing behavior in the face of cruel attitudes. On the contrary it is a soft mannered by resolute struggle, a non-violent action against violence.<sup>15</sup>

Several NGO's with social development work commented on several occasions that in their community development programs, without any of their effort friendship, solidarity and sisterhood are developing and strengthening the women to deal with a variety of problems. This is quite a common result of any structured groups that are together. The uniqueness in HMI's intervention lies in consciously creating opportunities and atmosphere for interfaith groups to become bridges across the communities and effective peacemakers. Our experience proves that the starting point of grassroot peace building are often very practical. Women give primary importance to food, children's education and economic security, and from there start their thinking towards peace building. Our interventions help build sustainable peace while addressing basic needs, including strengthening women's capacities in economic, social, cultural and political matters. Close observation of women's discussions, reactions, outcome, acknowledging the positive changes among the groups, creating opportunities to share their achievements and challenges are part of the steps towards peace building.

It is very challenging to prove the effectiveness of HMI's intervention, as several social development professionals have pointed out. HMI's response has been to give qualitative

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<sup>14</sup> An article by Le Thi Nham Tuyet and Ma Thi Phuong Tien on Vietnam non-violent activities to prevent violence. In "Women, violence and non-violent change" edited by Aruna Ghandason, MusimbiKanyora, Lucia Ann Mc Spadden. WCC publications, Geneva Pg 140

<sup>15</sup> Ibid pg. No.141

analysis and to share stories about situations, which signal a real difference as we work to help positively influence, the mindsets of the people. Our goal is to bring in change in the localities and to heal the psychological wounds of violence. In this context I want to share Dyan E. Mazurana and Susan R. McKay in their research in women and peace building observes

...our research found that while structural reconstruction is important and necessary, by itself it neither builds nor ensures peace. Many NGOs and grassroots groups were found to view peace building as a process, not a product, through which psychosocial, relational and spiritual needs were addressed. Grieving, sharing stories, participating in actions demanding governmental accountability, training in responding to post-traumatic stress disorder at individual and community levels, and working on common projects such as building schools and running radio stations were some of the processes through which communities sought to heal and rebuild communities just and peace.<sup>16</sup>

In our present situations of violence involving issues of class, caste, creed, color, religious, gender and the endless list of different types of violence, there is a massive need to work for conflict resolution and peace building. Some activists, who agree our argument, sometimes say that our efforts are a drop in the ocean. But still the fact remains that many drops make the ocean. HMI continues its efforts to involve NGOs in the social development field to be more sensitive to the interfaith spaces and peace, which are possible initiatives through community development.

While up the point that pooling our several drops to form ocean makes a great difference in the communal climate of the society, I also want to throw light on the challenges faced in this process. We often find it very difficult to reconcile the government policy and the NGO's interest. Especially when it is to design programmes for multi faith groups. In Shankernager our multi-faith and multi-caste group approached the government for financial support for its micro credit programmes. But the Government could not support this group as the state designed welfare schemes are for exclusive caste or religious groups. This choice was made by the state for various policy reasons. Since the women's group in Shankernager is a multi-faith group they could not be covered under any scheme. And concerned government departments suggested that women divide according to caste and religion wise to benefit from the government. Since women were not ready to divide at that point, they lost eligibility to be covered under a government welfare scheme. In this connection, for an effective and successful utilization of interfaith spaces, one should be recognized by both state for optimum utilization of resources available. Another challenge is the question of strategies. HMI is creating spaces for dialogue, and bringing change in people's mindsets, to build solidarity, sisterhood, through our programmes. In the long run women shaping themselves to be agents of building peaceful societies. But our concern is this whether all one needs to do for effective peace building? Or is there a something more?

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<sup>16</sup> Women and peacebuilding by DyanE.Mazurana and Susan R.McKay International centre for Human Rights and Democratic Development pg. 92



# Questions of Inter Religious Cooperation in Pakistan

by Shabnam Rashid

## Brief history of Pakistan

The separation in 1947 of British India into the Muslim state of Pakistan (with two sections West and East) and largely Hindu India was never satisfactorily resolved. A third war between these countries in 1971 resulted in East Pakistan becoming the separate nation of Bangladesh. Pakistan is an Islamic country with a population of 140 million people. Pakistan is located in Southern Asia, bordering the Arabian Sea, between India on the east and Iran and Afghanistan on the west and China in the north. According to Pakistan's Year-Book Christians are 3% of the population. A similar number of other religious minorities like Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhist and Bahai's also live in Pakistan. Feudalistic and patriarchal norms, and ancient rituals deny equal status to the oppressed classes, minorities and women.

### *Quaid-e-Azam Mohammed Ali Jinnah (Founder of Pakistan)*

Present socio-political situation of Pakistan violates the fundamental stance of Quaide-Azam Mohammed Ali Jinnah. To emphasis this point, I would like to quote three of Mr Jinnah's radio broadcasts. The first to the people of the United States of America, the second to those of Australia recorded in February 1948. And thirdly I will quote from the Quaid's Presidential Address to the constituent Assembly on 11 August 1947:

1. *Broadcast talk to the people of the United States America recorded in February 1948:* The constitution of Pakistan has yet to be framed by the Pakistan Constituent Assembly. I do not know what the ultimate shape of this constitution is going to be, but I am sure it will be of a democratic type, embodying the essential principles of Islam. Today, they are as applicable in actual life as they were 1,300 years ago. Islam and its idealism have taught us democracy. It has taught equality of man, justice and fair play to everybody. We are the inheritors of these glorious traditions and are fully alive to our responsibilities and obligations as framers of the future constitution of Pakistan. In any case, Pakistan is not going to be a theocratic state — to be ruled by priests with a divine- mission. We have non-Muslims — Hindus, Christians and Parsis — but they are all Pakistanis. They will enjoy the same rights and privileges as any other citizens and will play their rightful part in the affairs of Pakistan.
2. *Broadcast talk to the people of Australia recorded on 19 February 1948:* We are members of the brotherhood of Islam in which all are equal in rights, dignity and self-respect. Consequently, we have a special and a very deep sense of unity. But make no mistake: Pakistan is not a theocracy or anything like it. Islam demands from us the tolerance of other creeds and we welcome in closest association with us all those who, of whatever creed, are themselves willing and ready to play their part as true and loyal citizens of Pakistan.

3. *Quaid-e-Azam's Presidential Address to the constituent Assembly on 11 August 1947*: You are free; you are free to go to your temples, you are free to go to your mosques or to any other places of worship in this state of Pakistan. You may belong to any religion or caste or creed — that has nothing to do with the business of the state.

### **Islamization of Pakistani State**

In view of this one marvels, that impartiality of the constitution will/can lead towards a prosperous and a peaceful and just society. However, unfortunately, one can find discrepancies and contradictions<sup>1</sup> within the constitution of Pakistan. Unfortunately, for the last 56 years of our existence we have neither experienced democracy nor Islam in Pakistan. The country has mostly been ruled by authoritarian military regimes fully influenced by the international political & economic agenda. The first general elections on the basis of adult franchise and on party lines were held in 1970. These elections were recognized as first and free national elections. Islamic political parties putting forward a theocratic agenda lost badly and Zulfikar Ali Bhutto came into power. But, Islamic political parties despite the lack of overall popular support, carry a group of dedicated followers, with enough strength, organization and clout to keep all governments from implementing a progressive secular policy.

Once a step, ostensibly towards Islamization, has been taken no government can reverse it. This damaged the socio-political conditions which in turn destabilized the liberal ideology of Pakistan. A sudden shift in Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's liberal and pro-people stance was an example of such a condition. To fully comprehend this, let us review Bhutto's decisions and betrayal with voters:

1. The 1973 constitution had declared Islam as state religion and had reserved main position (president etc) in the State only for Muslims.
2. In 1974 Ahmadis, a Muslim sect, were declared non-Muslims.
3. Moreover, the state in a way imposes religious intolerance by demanding citizens to declare whether they are Muslim or non-Muslim. Muslims must also affirm that they accept the unqualified finality of the prophethood of Mohammed, declare that Ahmadis are non-Muslims, and specifically denounce the founder of the Ahmadia movement.
4. In 1977 Pakistan Peoples Party's new election manifesto included provisions which promised greater Islamization of society. Commitment to centre communal life more firmly upon Quran and to have Friday instead of Sunday as the weekly holiday.

The global political scenario, a tussle between Socialism (Soviet Union as super power) and Capitalism (Economic agenda of International Financial Institutions largely supported by America) highly influenced the agenda of the state of Pakistan at that time. General Ziaul Haq came to power in 1977 after overthrowing the government of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. He ruled the country for 11 years until 1988 when he was killed in a plane crash. He used the religious card

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<sup>1</sup> Article 25 elaborate as: (1) All citizens are equal before law and are entitled to equal protection of law. (2) There shall be no discrimination on the basis of sex alone.

as an excuse to stay in power and facilitated American's agenda to damage the Soviet Union in Afghanistan.

Azmat Abbas, a journalist, elaborates this point in his paper *Sectarianism* that, Zia-ul-Haq had used Islam as an instrument to prolong his power. During the early years of his rule, a number of religious organizations — having a limited agenda of spreading a specific brand of Islam -- cropped up everywhere and started indoctrinating the people in a way that affected the sectarian harmony at its roots. The promulgation of Zakat and Usher Ordinance<sup>2</sup> reduced the dependence of *maulavis* on general public for their daily bread, and their association with district and provincial administration made them powerful. Later, a new breed of “donor”-funded *maulavis* appeared on the scene. They were educated from various religious schools, both within the country and abroad, and dressed up in a manner that made it easy for the people to differentiate the *maulavi* of one sect from that of another. From where did this breed come? Who funded it and with what motives?

It is now known and accepted that Ziaul Haq instituted religious intolerance in Pakistan. Lit. Parallel Judicial Systems<sup>3</sup> and Discriminatory Laws are a reflection of his draconian steps: Hadood ordinance, 295 C (Blasphemy law)<sup>4</sup>, Qisas and Diyat ordinance<sup>5</sup>, Law of Evidence and separate electorate<sup>6</sup> - recently changed back into joint electorate. In addition, Objectives Resolution<sup>7</sup> was made operative part of the Constitution after excluding the right of minorities to “freely” practice their religion. This provoked extremist fanatic Islamic fundamentalists in Pakistan. The citizens of Pakistan were<sup>7</sup>— divided into several pockets, which created an intolerant society. The Objectives Resolution laid the foundations of a constitution which gave a religious color to politics, instead of keeping religion at bay in the political sense. To this day we are suffering the consequences of this. Unfortunately there is no progress towards transformation of a fair legislative process in the country even by the politically elected governments. Pervez Musharraf's government, however, imposed a ban on the activities of the religious groups Lashkar-e-Jhangvi and Sipah-e-Muhammad Pakistan on 14 August 2001, while Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan and Tehrik-e-Jafria Pakistan were, on 12 January 2002, placed under monitoring. For the first time, the government has shown firm resolve to address the issue. It is another sad reality that a military dictatorship took steps that no democratic

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<sup>2</sup> Zakat and Usher Ordinance 1979, for the first time, brought the collection and distribution of *zakat* under the state control. *Zakat* was also imposed in the form of a tax on bank accounts.

<sup>3</sup> The creation of Federal Shariat Court<sup>3</sup> is not justifiable, since its jurisdiction and powers run parallel to, and at times overlap those of Supreme Court. Moreover, FSC did not serve any special purpose, as the Council of Islamic Ideology was already responsible for ensuring that laws of the country were in accordance with Islam.

<sup>4</sup> **295B** Offenses relating to religion “Pakistan Penal code”: Defiling, etc. of copy of Holy Quran. Whoever will fully defile, damages or desecrates a copy of the Holy Quran or of an extract there from or uses it in any derogatory manner or for any unlawful purpose shall be punishable for imprisonment for life. **295C** Use of derogatory remarks, etc; in respect of the Holy Prophet. Whoever by words, either spoken or written or by visible representation, or by any imputation, innuendo, or insinuation, directly or indirectly, defiles the sacred name of the Holy Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) shall be punished with death, or imprisonment for life, and shall also be liable to fine (largely used to settle personal grievances against the oppressed ones, minorities).

<sup>5</sup> The criminal law Amendment Act, 1979, the Qisas (punishment equal to offense which can only be imposed when strict evidentiary requirements are fulfilled) and *Diyat* (blood money as a settlement for the crime).

<sup>6</sup> minorities to elect their own candidate but can't cast vote for Muslim candidates.

<sup>7</sup> The Objectives Resolution was passed by the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan in March, 1949, and was made a substantive part of the Constitution of Pakistan by P. O. (Presidential Order) No. 14 of 1985, Art. 2 and Sch. Item 2 (with effect from March 2, 1985).

government would have dared to take against these organizations. It is worth noting here that it was a military regime that midwived the birth of these religious parties and again now with the change in the global politico-economic agenda another military government is reversing the process.

1. (1)	Pakistan shall be a Federal Republic to be known as the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, hereinafter referred to as Pakistan.
2.	Islam shall be the State religion of Pakistan.
2A.	The principles and provisions set out in the Objectives Resolution reproduced in the Annex are hereby made substantive part of the Constitution and shall have effect accordingly.
41. (2)	A person shall not be qualified for election as President unless he is a Muslim of not less than forty-five years of age and is qualified to be elected as member of the National Assembly.
227 (1)	All existing laws shall be brought in conformity with the injunctions of Islam as laid down in the Holy Quran and <i>Sunnah</i> , in this part referred to as the injunctions of Islam, and no law shall be enacted which is repugnant to such Injunctions.
295-B	Offenses relating to religion "Pakistan Penal code": Defiling, etc, of copy of Holy Quran. Whoever willfully defiles, damages or desecrates a copy of the Holy Quran or of an extract therefrom or uses it in any derogatory manner or for any unlawful purpose shall be punishable with imprisonment for life.
295-C	Use of derogatory remarks, etc; in respect of the Holy Prophet. Whoever by words, either spoken or written or by visible representation, or by any imputation, innuendo, or insinuation, directly or indirectly, defiles the sacred name of the Holy Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) shall be punished with death, or imprisonment for life, and shall also be liable to fine.

### Religious Tolerance a Challenge

Democracy as globally practiced and understood is the name of an attitude, which is flexible and accommodative in its very essence. But this is not how it is understood in Pakistan. Periodic constitutional amendments further damage the process of an already rotten democracy in Pakistan. As a result religious bigotry has become the norm of our society. This contradicts and obscures the traditions of universal love and compassion established and practiced by a long line of Muslim sufi-saints over the ages in Pakistan and India.

It is a noteworthy fact that Islam spread in the subcontinent mostly through sufi saints. It is worth noting here that the history of the Indian subcontinent is very different from that of Europe and other areas. Our history is a continuity of traditions and rituals over 5,000 years old and still going strong today. Dogma and sectarianism or religious intolerance never appealed to the majority of Muslims in ancient India. The majority still exhibits religious tolerance, to elaborate my claim let me quote from Salman Rashid's book *Riders on the wind*, published by Sang-E-Meel-Lahore:

- 1) **Cult of the River God (page 72 and 74):** They come here seeking the saint's benediction, Hindus and Muslims alike. While the one sits cross-legged in front of the eternal light and reads from Geeta the other sways to the rhythmic incantations of the Quran. To the former this is Udero Lal, to the latter Sheikh Tahir and within the domed vaults of the brilliantly white washed shrine — an hour's drive from Hyderabad in Sindh — intonations from Geeta mingle with those from the Quran, for the Hindu and the Muslim portions are but separated by a small room. Here is the perfect unification of these two great religions of Sindh.

It is recorded that the buildings were constructed under the orders of the Moghul emperor Shah Jehan who decreed the erection of secular buildings to suit followers of both religions. Today, the small temple has a miniature marble samadhi where the eternal light burns while across the adjoining room is the grave of Udero Lal or Shaikh Tahir, as he is known to the Muslims. Conflicting as the two religions may be, within the precincts of this shrine they are in total accord. Here they rise above the banal and the trivial to exhibit a tolerance that is truly remarkable for both religions.

- 2) **Where Durga Sleeps (page 122):** Every year Hindus from all over Pakistan make the annual pilgrimage to Hinglaj in the last week of January to find favor with the goddess Durga whose pictures adorn the interior of the temple. And the Muslims, whenever they make the arduous journey, do so for Bibi Nani to intercede on their behalf with Allah. Unknown to the adherents of both these faiths their deity was worshipped long ago by the Chaldeans as Nana and Babylonians as Nania.

There are many such examples in the subcontinent which authenticate my point that religious disputes were not part of this land but were recently instituted by the State to favor the global politico-economic agenda. To be more precise to satisfy American's lust for ultimate power.

### **Harmonized Society and South Asia Partnership-Pakistan (SAP-PK)**

SAP-PK is a network of participatory development-support organizations operating under the same name and for the same purposes in Canada and five South Asian countries of Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. SAP-PK comprises a General Body, National Council and Secretariat managed by professional staff. SAPPK started working toward organizing people to form/strengthen community-based organizations (CBOs) for collective well-being in 1989. Prior focus of SAP-PK's initiatives (Programs and Trainings) is to impart education to all social, political and human Rights activists from all over the country with a view to build their capacity and create a critical mass in Pakistan.

The challenge before SAP-PK is to renew and strengthen the age-old culture of peace, tolerance and secularism within its own limited resources. Strategically, since its emergence various groups/ngos/community based organizations were involved as active partners. With the help of these partners SAP-PK has successfully taken forward the agenda of a just society. With the belief that access to information is the fundamental right of an individual SAP-PK started its

Development Dialogue series and a national research program with a special focus on peace related topics/issues:

**Development Dialogue 2001-2002:**

- *Religious Harmony and Intolerance*
- *Sectarianism: Problems and Solution*
  - ◇ *Sufism and Peace*
  - ◇ *Culture of Tolerance*
  - ◇ *Effects of Sectarianism on Women in Pakistan*
- *Arms Culture in Pakistan*
- *Peace Studies and Conflict Resolution*

**Recent Publications:**

- National Research Program on *Sectarianism*:
  - ◇ Subcontinent: A history of tolerance. By Qazi Javaid
  - ◇ Sectarianism: The players and the game. By Azmat Abbas
  - ◇ Muslim rulers: Politics and Religion. By Anwar Chaudhary
- Citizen and Governance
- Illustrated Hand Book on Militarization

SAP-PK recognized the need to enhance its audience to create a harmonized society. So along with its Dialogues and National research program, SAP-PK facilitated the formation of Pakistan Commission for Minority Rights (PCMR).

SAP-PK understands that folk festivals are great social mixers and tools to diffuse any possible socio-religious tensions. Basant, Besakhi, Holy, Eid, Shab e Barat, death anniversaries of saints and so many more occasions of the like were indigenized and redesigned for just such purpose. Consequently, we moved ahead adopting cultural events as a means of mobilizing the masses. Our activities aimed at raising social harmony currently include:

- 1) **“Minority Rights Commission of Pakistan” (MRCP):** Though SAP-PK acknowledges the fact that minority issues are only one part of the larger issues confronted by the people of Pakistan and there is no solution for such issues but to be an active part of mainstream struggle. In this view, the creation of MRCP was supported. MRCP aims at protecting and safeguarding human, political, social, economic, religious and cultural rights of Pakistan’s minorities promoting a democratic and secular civil society.
- 2) **Cultural Events:** Along with its intellectual/academic initiatives, SAP-PK started socio-cultural activities with the basic idea to impart a message of peaceful coexistence. For this SAP-PK started celebrating birth anniversaries of Punjabi Sufi Saints. The occasions are marked by recital of their respective poetry. Dissemination in printed form of selected poetry of these poets goes along with the celebration.

Let me share few verses of Bulleh Shah, who had little faith in the priestly class which promises people salvation. Their personal lives were often far from being religious. They exploited simple people for personal gains. Bulleh Shah clearly saw through their tricks:

Roman Urdu	English
<p>Mullah, kazi rah batawaan, deen bharam de phere</p> <p>Eh tan thug jagat dey, jeha lawan jaal chaufere</p> <p>Karam shara dey dharma batavan, sangla pavan paire</p>	<p>The mullahs and Kazis mislead into a maze of superstition.</p> <p>These thugs of the world spread their net wide,</p> <p>Claiming to preach the Law they shackle the listener</p>
<p>Har maxhad vich oh disda</p> <p>Under bahar jalwa disda</p>	<p>I see the same God in each religion,</p> <p>The one who lives without and within</p>
<p>Bullehya mullan tey mashalchi</p> <p>Dohan iko chit</p> <p>Lokan kardey chananan app hanarey nit</p>	<p>Bulleh the mullah and the torch bearer</p> <p>Are in a way alike</p> <p>Themselves in the dark, Show other light</p>

Here I would like to refer the Sura Al Nas from the Quran which has same meanings: You are all equal and No body is superior from others. Every one is equally responsible for their conduct. The one with good conduct will be nearer to God.

Future Dimensions: Interfaith Harmony requires equality and mutual respect in a society. However, the existing milieu presents a different picture of Pakistani society. Dialogue is the only option for us to construct a society where citizens will be able to resolve all their differences and work hand in hand with each other. Dialogue can help to open minds and transforms people from being hard and exclusive to becoming soft and inclusive. Knowledge,

trust, equality and diversity are key words in interfaith dialogue. So educational process needs to be analyzed and change accordingly. A collective effort to pressurize the State to repeal all draconian laws and remove existing discrepancies in the constitution of Pakistan. Without it a vision of a harmonized society cannot be fulfilled; a society where people protect the basic rights of the weak and minorities; a society where there is no war and every one lives in peace. Movements for peace and harmony also require regional and international endeavors as well.

## **Annex One**

### **[Article 2(A)]                      The Objectives Resolution**

*The Objectives Resolution was passed by the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan in March, 1949, and was made a substantive part of the Constitution of Pakistan by P.O. (Presidential Order) No.14 of 1985, Art.2 and Sch.item 2 (with effect from March 2, 1985).*

Whereas sovereignty over the entire universe belongs to Allah Almighty alone and the authority which He has delegated to the State of Pakistan, through its people for being exercised within the limits prescribed by Him is a sacred trust;

This Constituent Assembly representing the people of Pakistan resolves to frame a Constitution for the sovereign independent State of Pakistan; Wherein the State shall exercise its powers and authority through the chosen representatives of the people;

Wherein the principles of democracy, freedom, equality, tolerance and social justice as enunciated by Islam shall be fully observed;

Wherein the Muslims shall be enabled to order their lives in the individual and collective spheres in accordance with the teachings and requirements of Islam as set out in the Holy Quran and the Sunnah;

Wherein adequate provision shall be made for the minorities to profess and practice their religions and develop their cultures;

Wherein the territories now included in or in accession with Pakistan and such other territories as may hereafter be included in or accede to Pakistan shall form a Federation wherein the units will be autonomous with such boundaries and limitations on their powers and authority as may be prescribed;

Wherein shall be guaranteed fundamental rights including equality of status, of opportunity and before law, social, economic and political justice, and freedom of thought, expression, belief, faith, worship and association, subject to law and public morality;



Wherein adequate provisions shall be made to safeguard the legitimate interests of minorities and backward and depressed classes;

Wherein the independence of the Judiciary shall be fully secured;

Wherein the integrity of the territories of the Federation, its independence and all its rights including its sovereign rights on land, sea and air shall be safeguarded;

So that the people of Pakistan may prosper and attain their rightful and honored place amongst the nations of the World and make their full contribution towards international peace and progress and happiness of humanity.

## **Khmer Ahimsa Presentation**

**by Thorng Kakada**

Peacebuilding is the main focus of Khmer Ahimsa's work. Peacebuilding is not limited to a single set of activities or techniques. It can be broadly defined as any method that increases the individual and the community's ability to respond creatively and non-violently to conflict and change. Peacebuilding means increased security, trust, solidarity, cooperation and confidence among individuals and communities. It means building recognition and acceptance of the idea that people can and should work cooperatively for the common good, and rejection of the idea that violence and abuse of power are natural or acceptable ways of gaining control over people or resources -

Khmer Ahimsa believes that for peacebuilding to be real and sustainable, it must begin at the individual level by challenging and changing attitudes. But peacebuilding cannot stop at the individual level - It is only real when it can be practiced in the family, in the community, and in relation to society at large. The mission of Khmer Ahimsa is to work to empower individuals and communities to promote peace, reconciliation, democracy, human rights, equality and justice. Khmer Ahimsa encourages the development of nonviolent skills and conflict resolution capacities. It does this through education, extension, exchange, and supporting the initiatives for peacebuilding of individuals and communities. It works in partnership with others who have compatible goals both inside and outside of Cambodia. Khmer Ahimsa's approach is to work in harmony with the cultures, traditions and beliefs of the people without discrimination and to be responsive to the issues facing Cambodian society at this time in history.

### **Background Information**

Although Cambodia was no longer experiencing armed conflict, people were still unable to plan with certainty. Rapid political and economic change was taking place. Informal social arrangements that provided security had changed, but formal, rule-of-law arrangements that might have provided protection were weak or non-existent. These changes were happening in a situation of widespread poverty and unemployment, 'Much caused large numbers of people to

migrate, further weakening traditional social ties. As a result, individual and community ability to cope with conflict and injustice was severely weakened. Level of violence, fear and distrust were high, and communities had great difficulty working together to improve their situation.

Khmer Ahimsa staff began working together in 1999<sup>1</sup> to explore local resources and traditions of community level peacebuilding. Working mainly in Sre Ambel and Kompong Seila District, Koh Kong Province, the project discovered three main avenues that have the potential to strengthen communities' capacity to deal effectively with conflict and change:

To support and encourage villages and religious communities to build and strengthen local Institutions that can promote peace and solidarity.

1. *The Community peacebuilding:* Through the traditional beliefs to bring the unity of the people. Community Sala Bons [traditional meeting houses for religious or community events] offered a way of rebuilding solidarity and a spirit of self-help in communities. The people in the community remembered these structures from their youth, and that organizing to build the Sala Bon gave many villagers their first positive experience of working together to solve problems and build solidarity. Once the Sala Bons were built, communities began to meet together spontaneously every seven days for religious ceremonies. Some communities have begun organizing traditional self-help groups such as the funeral association or small savings groups. The Sala Bons have the potential to become community peacebuilding centers where people can circulate information, discuss livelihood issues and talk together about how to solve problems.
2. *Working with the monks' community:* Monks have traditionally been mediators, teachers, and peacebuilders in Cambodian communities. Currently, a lack of leadership and low education weakens their ability to carry out these roles, and monks have become isolated from their communities and from each other. In Sre Ambel, the project began supporting monthly meetings for monks from 15 pagodas, which gave monks an opportunity to talk about their roles and about the problems they face. As a result, monks have started to become more active. They organized their first meditation campaign, started classes for young people in pagodas, and solicited support to build a Center for Moral Education

To build community capacity to address conflict and injustice through skill and knowledge in peacebuilding

3. *Training in Peacebuilding:* Khmer Ahimsa developed training materials that combine additional beliefs with new concepts about communication, negotiation, advocacy and grassroots democracy in order to provide people with new options for dealing with conflict in their lives and communities. Their core training is the Peaceful Heart training, a three-day program that allows groups to analyze conflict as it affects their lives, and look at Buddhist and cultural teachings that can help them to understand their situation and find positive, non-

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<sup>1</sup> At this time KAH was part of the American Friends Service Committee Program in Sre Ambel, Koh Kong Province and was called the Local Capacities for Non-Violence [LCN] Project. Staff have been managing the project independently since 2001. In October 2002, LCN applied for registration as a Cambodian NGO -- Khmer Ahimsa or Khmer Non-Violence Organization. Formal Registration is expected sometime in early 2003.

violent ways to address the problem. Khmer Ahimsa also provides training in mediation skills and in active nonviolence as a tool for addressing power abuse and injustice.

To be actively involved in and supportive of peacebuilding activities and efforts to reduce violence and injustice by sharing information and working in coalitions and networks inside and outside of Cambodia.

The contribution to Cambodia peace networks + coalitions. We organize & participate in training and activities of networks that are directly relevant to KAH's work. Assist in network coordination. Join coalitions to respond to specific issues as appropriate.

*Target Area:*

Koh Kong was a stronghold for armed groups, including the Khmer Rouge, until 1996. There is still a large military presence in the province. The area along the Sre Ambel River and the coast of the Kompong Som Bay is also notorious for smuggling and trafficking and has a reputation as a hiding place for robbers and pirates. Insecurity and difficult communication mean that this area has been largely neglected both by Government services and by international organizations. Because the education level in the province is low, many local level officials are assigned from outside. They bring their prejudices with them and work with very little oversight from either provincial or central level authorities.

*Goal:*

The goal of Khmer Ahimsa is to empower people to use their nonviolent capacities by supporting and encouraging community-level initiatives to build peace and reduce violence and injustice in Cambodia.

**Key Input Requirements:** Peacebuilding is a process of social change. It is the process and not the product. Khmer Ahimsa takes very seriously the challenge of working with people who are deeply rooted in dependency after decades of civil war and abuse by people in power. Khmer Ahimsa tries to build people's courage by listening carefully to their ideas, trying to understand their situation, and providing support to their initiatives to build peace. Staff spend a great deal of time in the community, usually staying overnight in order to communicate in a more natural way with a larger number of people.

Khmer Ahimsa's strategies in the community can be summarized as follows:

*"Waiting for the people"* - Khmer Ahimsa is more interested in quality than quantity. In order to counteract the culture of dependency, staff tries to reduce their advisory role in the community and wait to see which communities are interested in peace work. For example, some communities in the target area were very interested in a Saleon until they realized that Khmer Ahimsa was not going to build it for them. Staff stayed in touch with these communities, but focused their attention on communities that took initiative to organize the work themselves. Some of the disinterested communities became interested when they saw change happening in the neighboring village, and contacted Khmer Ahimsa again.

*"Building peace from the heart"* - Khmer Ahimsa believes strongly that if you want others to have peace, you should have peace within yourself. Staff try to put this into practice in the

relations with each other and with communities. It is also the basic message of the Peaceful Heart training, which is the foundation of their community peace-building work.

*“Pouring new concrete on the old foundation”* - When new concrete is poured on top of old, builders must scrape ridges into the old surface so that the new and the old will bind together. In the same way, when new ideas [such as communication skills, advocacy, human rights...] are introduced in trainings, Khmer Ahimsa start by exploring people’s experiences and the stories, ideas, or concepts from traditional culture or Buddhist religion, religion to provide a familiar foundation to bind new ideas to the old.

*“Assembling the pieces of the basket”* - The process of building community solidarity cannot be rushed and great improvements should not be expected quickly. Peace workers need to understand the stages of the process. As Meas Nee said, “A village broken by war can be compared to a basket that has been broken and the pieces scattered. The pieces are still there but not everyone can see them. What has been broken can be rewoven slowly and gradually but only by those who will take time to stay close to the village and build trust. Vile village people are the weavers themselves and they carry the task forward. Eventually, the basket will be better than before, but first it must be something like the same.

*“Taking the frog out of the well”* - Cambodian people, when they feel isolated, say they are living like a frog in a well — no liberty, no light, no hope. Khmer Ahimsa has found that bringing community people to visit other places [meetings in Phnom Penh, other provinces, other countries] is a powerful way to increase people’s confidence and hope. Sometimes they are very frightened initially, but the experience of travelling, of speaking about their situation, and of seeing the situation of others shows people that they are not alone. Faking people out of the well of isolation can be a powerful motivator for change.

*“Watering the root to get the fruit”* - Khmer Ahimsa works at the grassroots level, but with the idea that work at this level can influence the higher levels. For example, Khmer Ahimsa works with the local monks so that they can improve their practice and understanding, but these monks will bring the new ideas to the provincial and national conventions where they can contribute more widely to social awareness.

*“Catching the fish while they are in the trap”* - When fish are caught in a trap, they thrash about and use their energy to try to find their way out. It is the same with communities in times of crisis; people have high energy and a desire to do something to change the situation. Khmer Ahimsa believes that crisis provides an important opportunity for people to change and grow. Khmer Ahimsa works closely with communities in times of crisis to help them assess their situation and look for positive, non-violent ways to solve their problem. It is at these times that people can use the skills learned in the Peaceful Heart training and practice the solidarity they have been building through the Sala Bon.

## BUDDHIST PERSPECTIVE ON PEACEBUILDING IN CAMBODIA

Cambodia is known as a Buddhist nation. More than 3000 pagodas have been rehabilitated across the country in recent year. But how well do the people understand the teaching of Buddha. Peace and Meditation are the same. Meditation is the Buddhist philosophy of awakening which means to “ To Wake Up “. Somebody may think that working for peace has nothing to do with meditation but indeed they are one and the same. We practice meditation so that our heart is peaceful, for a peaceful society. We can not meditate and ignore those nearby who are hungry, sick, or suffering. Buddha said Hatred is never appeased by hatred and it can be appeased by love.

There is little we can do for peace in the world without peace in our minds. When we begin to make peace we begin with silence - meditation. Peacemaking requires compassion and it requires the skill of listening. To listen, we have to give up ourselves. Peace making begins with us. As we make peace for we discover new possibilities for resolving conflicts. Peacemaking requires wisdom.

#### *How can Buddhism help society?*

Buddhism can help in three ways: through people refraining from evil action; performing good actions and purifying their own minds. Buddha advised that both faith and ‘wisdom have to be balanced. Like a bird has two wings, or a human has two feet, you have to use both. Another teaching is the Four Noble Truths; That is the first Truth is that life is suffering. To live you must suffer. The second Truth is that all suffering is caused by craving. The cause of this psychological suffering is Greedy, Hatred and Delusion. The third Truth is that suffering can be overcome and happiness attained. The Fourth Noble Truth is the Path leading overcoming of suffering. This path is called the Eightfold Path and consists of:

- Right Understanding
- Right Thought
- Right speech
- Right Action
- Right livelihood
- Right Effort
- Right mindfulness
- Right Concentration

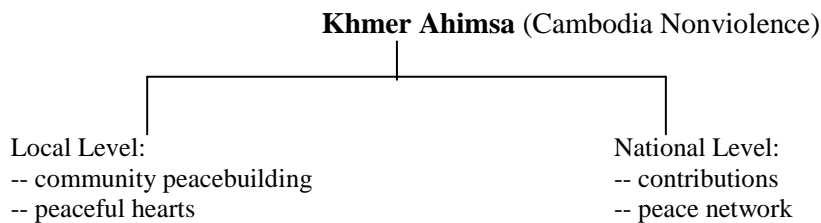
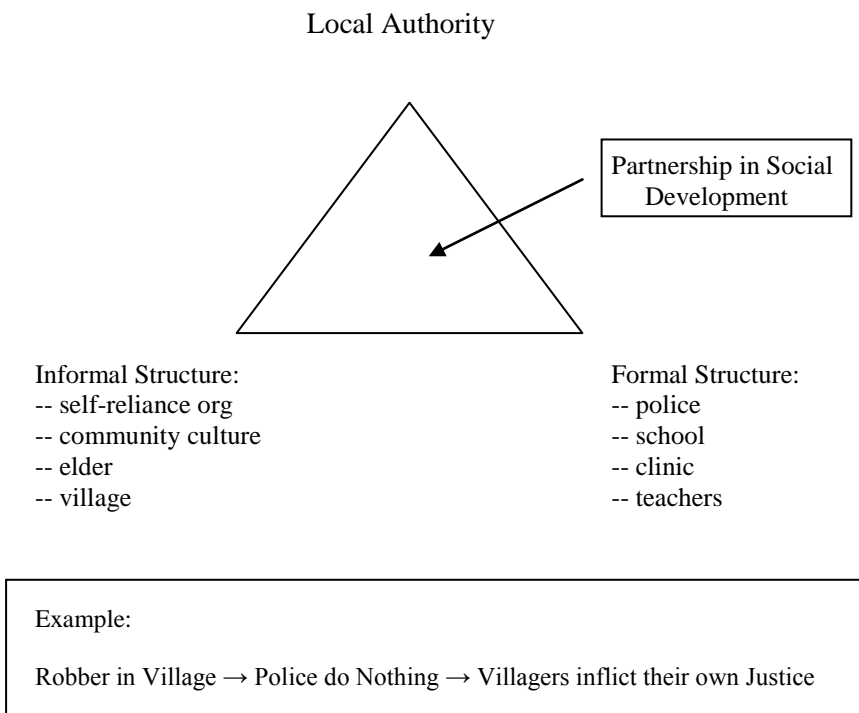
This Eightfold Path cover every aspect of life: the intellectual, the ethical, the social and economic and the psychological and therefore contain everything a person needs to lead a good life and to develop spiritual.

Do not believe yet for what you have just heard  
Do not believe yet for what is just a cultural belief  
from one to another  
Do not believe yet for what is just a rumor  
Do not believe yet for what it is written in the  
religious book or bible  
Do not believe yet for what is just the advice or instruction  
from the elder or teacher

But after good observation and deep analysis and to see that this Dhamma fits to your life, your understanding and provides more advantage to the general people,  
Please accept it and believe it. The Buddha

*There is no beginning and no end. Peacemaking is like breathing. We cannot stop, if we stop, there is fighting again, we die. If we continue, peace will prevail".* Venerable Moha Ghosenanda

## Diagram from Kakada's Presentation



# **Strengthening Interfaith Movement Amidst the Philippine Government's All-Out War Campaigns**

*(The Bangsamoro People's Fight Against State Discrimination and Oppression in the Philippines)*

**by Amirah Ali Lidasan**

Like most of you, we Muslims in the Philippines wanted peace and unity to prevail amidst diversity of religion in our country. However, there are some factors or circumstances created by our government that makes the path to peace seem rather distant.

I belong to the 13th ethnolinguistic group of Islamized national minorities in the Philippines, collectively known as the Moro people. We live mostly in the southern pan of the Philippines, dispersed in the second major island, Mindanao. We comprise about eight to ten percent of the 80 million Philippine population. Elsewhere in the country, we inhabit mostly rural and urban poor areas in the other islands of Luzon and Visayas

Since my childhood, I have witnessed the sufferings of our people. Often I would hear stories from my grandparents about how bravely our ancestors fought Spanish and American colonialism. The Spaniards were the ones who coined the term MORO to describe the Islamized tribes who were resistant to Christianization and colonial rule. The term Moro, which was then a derogatory word to describe the Muslims, was used by the future generation of Moro people to signify defiance.

The story would go on as to how they fought the big Filipino landlords, who head the Philippine government, from grabbing our ancestral homes. The grabbing of lands and consequent displacement of the Moro people started when in I 900s the Philippine government opened the lands in Mindanao for fruit and rubber plantations of multinational corporations such as DOLE Pineapple, Del Monte and Sime Darby. Along with the investors, Filipino workers from poor and landless families from Luzon and Visayas were enticed to work for the companies and were given incentives of owning lands in Mindanao for free. This was to the disadvantage of the Moro people and other indigenous groups in Mindanao collectively known as Lumads.

I was borne at the time of the Martial Law, when Philippines became a battle ground for the fascist ruling of President Ferdinand Marcos, at the time when Mindanao became the battleground of his administration's counter-insurgency measures against Moro minorities and national liberation movements.

It was during Martial Law that the Moro National Liberation Front, the biggest Muslim liberation movement in 70's, was established because the Moro people were fed up with the series of military campaigns of the Philippine government against our people who fought land-grabbing schemes such as state land occupation and resettlement programs. Scores of Moro people died in the Jabidah Massacre, Pata Island Massacre and other similar genocidal campaigns of the government. In the hinterlands, the MNLF were the Moro armed fighters for the freedom of the *Bangsamoro* or the Moro Nation. In Manila, the country's capital, they were supported by hundreds of Moro youth who joined massive protest demonstrations against President Marcos and the declaration of Martial Law that affected millions of Filipino and Moro people.

In the years that would follow, the Moro people will be thrown into series of military campaigns designed to stop the Muslim secession movement in Mindanao and the need for the Philippine government to take control of the Moro communities for economic development purposes.

**Resistance in Mindanao: Towards national freedom, democracy and right to self-determination**

In Mindanao, the long-standing feud between Muslims and Christians was utilized as the focal point in every military campaign. Differences in religion were magnified and used by some ambitious presidents and military officials for their campaigns that would catapult them to stardom. The sad fact is that even Moro politicians, former rebels and warlords are in cahoots with these plans.

Traditionally, the Moro resistance was defined more by armed struggle than the legal movement and parliamentary struggle. The Moro people do not believe that they are part of the Philippines, always with the desire of continuing the Sultanate state that the Spanish and American colonials tried to destroy. The Moro people seldom recognize the Philippine Constitution, owing more to the Sharia Law and the Qur'an as the basis for their political, religious and human rights.

There are two paths that would best describe the Moro struggle: independence and integration. The primary struggle is independence and are led by the Moro revolutionary organizations, the Moro National Liberation Front and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front. The goal of this armed struggle is to set up an independent state for the Moro people. The second are composed of families from the former Sultanates, traditional Moro organizations in the legal front, most of them traditional political parties that are more involved with the integration of the Moro intellectuals into the mainstream political set-up.

In between these movements are social movements that struggle to uphold the human rights of the Moro people in accordance with the existing human rights and international humanitarian law, with recognition to the Moro traditional and Islamic laws. These social movements are established to fight for the struggle of the Moro people for their right to self-determination, including establishing an independent state.

Within these social movements are organizations that believe in uniting the struggle of the majority of the Filipino people and the struggle of the Moro people, that is the struggle for national freedom and democracy and the struggle of the Moro people and other indigenous people for right to self-determination.



The struggle of the Moro people's right to land and life are embedded in the struggle of the Filipino people for democracy. The Moro people fight alongside with the Filipino people against colonial and national oppression in the Philippines, the control of the foreign economic superpowers, particularly the United States of America, and their local cohorts such as the Philippine government, local big businessmen and landlords.

### **An interfaith movement in the Philippines**

The mainstream interfaith movement in the Philippines deals more in uniting Muslims and Christians in religious parameters. They were composed of religious institutions concentrated in working for religious unity and tolerance among religion. But it was only during President Joseph Estrada's All-Out War military offensives in year 2000, a vicious military campaign designed to overturn MILF camps and Moro communities in the name of stopping secession in Mindanao, that the interfaith movement between Filipino Muslims and Christians took a different turn. The Moro-Christian People's Alliance, when it was established in 1999, gave a venue for Muslims and Christians in the Philippines to focus their campaign in shedding religious differences to fight for Muslim people's rights and welfare, even advancing towards giving full support in the Moro people's struggle for their right to self-determination.

MCPA also helped in convening Kalinaw Mindanao, a interfaith peace movement consisting of lawmakers, civil libertarians, church people and Muslim religious groups against the all-out war campaign. This campaign snowballed into the Ouster of Estrada campaign in which our group, the MCPA, led the rest of the Moro youth and urban poor communities in based in Manila to call for the ouster of President Estrada.

The raging war in Mindanao became an issue of the struggle of the Moro people's right to self-determination, correcting the wrong notion of a religious war between Moros and Christians. Catholics and Protestants joined hands with Muslims in protest rallies to stop the war in Mindanao, and the series of military campaigns of the Philippine government against the Moro people.

Respect for human rights also became the banner of the protest movement of the victims of intensive military crackdown in Basilan, southwest of Philippines. For instance, while we are organizing the families of the victims of President Arroyo's crackdown, and are also busy organizing interfaith activities for the Muslims and Christians in Basilan that would focus mostly in shared experiences in fighting for human rights. The crackdown in Basilan affected not only the Muslims but also the Christians. Anyone who is against the policy of the government is marked an Abu Sayyaf supporter, sympathizer and can therefore be arrested without warrant.

Forum and symposium, integration in Moro communities, exposure programs and fact-finding missions have been effective tools in breaking the barrier of differences and historically rooted animosities between two religions. Tolerance is a virtue that is a must for all who respect human rights and interfaith endeavors. As we learn and fight for our basic rights as people, we also come to accept and tolerate each other's differences.

For those who have and had an opportunity to understand the plight of the Moro people, they bring these stories back to their own provinces and countries. Through this, they are able to

educate others about the plight of their Moro brothers and sisters. Eventually, they too, together with the Muslims and Moro peoples in their communities organize among themselves to form advocacy organizations supporting the struggle of the Moro national minorities for land and the right to self-determination.

Peace may not be far behind for the people of the Philippines if justice prevails in our country. The Moro and the Filipino people, the Christians and the Muslims, must unite and fight side by side in forwarding our collective rights as people of our country against colonialism and national oppression. In turn, aspirations of the national minorities for our right to self-determination must be recognized, respected and forwarded.

*(Amirah Ali Lidasan, hails from the Iranon tribe, a Filipino Muslim woman from Mindanao, Southern Philippines. She is currently the secretary-general and the spokesperson of the Moro-Christian People 's Alliance (MCPA), an interfaith people 's organization in the Philippines that aims to unite Filipino Muslims and Christian in advocating for the recognition and protection of the rights and we/fare of the Moro national minorities and the realization of their struggle for right to self-determination.)*

## **The Impact of Islamisation of Laws on Multi-cultural Malaysia: Some experiences on issues of justice, peace, sustainability and gender**

**by Salbiah Ahmad**

### **Introduction**

Malaysia is a federal state comprising of 13 states. It has a written constitution forged at independence in 1957 with revisions in 1963 with the inclusion of the states of Sabah and Sarawak (East Malaysia).

The independent constitution proclaimed the supremacy of the constitution. Islam is provided to be religion of the federation. The inclusion of Islam as religion of the federation clause respects the historical significance of the religion of Islam as the religion of the Malay rulers and a feature of the constitution of the several Malay states before independence. The constitution presumes that all ethnic Malays are Muslims. The definition of a Malay in Article 160 is “a person who professes the religion of Islam.”

The constitution recognises the multi-cultural nature of the people of the nation as well. The full text of the religion of the federation clause reads as follows:

“Article 3 (1): Islam is the religion of the Federation; but other religions may be practised in peace and harmony in any part of the Federation.”

The constitution itself has particular manifestations of Art. 3. Some of these are as follows:

- The equal protection clause in Article 8 does not among other things, “invalidate or prohibit” any personal law (meaning Islamic law).
- The freedom of religion clause in Article 11 does not allow the adherents of other faiths to propagate their doctrines among Muslims and state Muslim law may make law to that effect.
- Article 12 does not allow discrimination in education on several grounds including religion and race. There are some exceptions. Every religious group has the right to establish and maintain educational institutions for children in its own religion. Muslim educational institutions have a right of financial support from the government. No person shall be required to receive instructions in or to take part in any ceremony or act of worship of a religion other than his own. The religion of any person below 18 shall be decided by his parent or guardian.

The constitution recognises the parallel system of both civil and Islamic legal systems by providing separate legislative lists. Islamic law is primarily a function of state legislatures. The topics upon which state lawmakers can make law are also itemised in the constitution itself. State lawmakers generally can make law relating to the family law of Muslims and precepts of the religion. There is a limited power to make law on Islamic criminal law. Penalties under state Islamic laws are however restricted to fines and a jail sentences.

As a general rule, no non-Muslim should be subject to Islamic law. Muslims are bound by both Civil and Islamic laws.

### **Selected experiences**

1. The campaign for the enactment of a law on domestic violence  
The domestic violence campaign (DV campaign), came out of a national consultation among women and women’s groups in 1985. The Domestic Violence Act (DVA) was passed in 1994 and enforced in 1996. The campaign took almost 10 years.

One of the major pitfalls to the DV campaign was the division of law between Civil and Islamic laws. The women mooted for one law for all Malaysians. It was imperative for the campaign to secure the support of Muslims for an Act of Parliament. The initial lack of support from Muslim groups (including Muslim authorities and scholars) arose from different understandings arising out of certain verses in the Qur’an on the beating of recalcitrant wives (nashizah). Detractors also noted that state Muslim laws had provided for injunction against molestation clauses in its family law enactments.

This was an impasse in the early days of the campaign and women in the DV campaign (multi-ethnic and a multi-religious grouping called the Joint Action Group or JAG-DVA) had to re-strategise. One was to begin intra-religious understanding of the textual sources on Islam in relation to beating of women and to study the existing state Muslim law on the issue. Study

groups were formed and information were shared in intra-religious and inter-religious forums, the media and among networking partners and policy makers.

In 1994, the Attorney- General's (AG) chambers expedited a draft DVA and held several consultations with JAG, the relevant ministries, academics and Muslim religious institutions.

Another impasse occurred when JAG-DVA's proposal to include marital rape as an expressed offence of domestic violence was rejected by the AG on the strength of an objection by a local association of Muslim scholars (membership was predominantly male). JAG's insistence that the Muslim scholars attend meetings to discuss the matter with JAG's resource persons on the matter was rejected. This created a second impasse which was seen largely as another attempt to prevent the DVA from being applicable to non-Muslims and Muslims.

The second impasse in 1994 threatened to split JAG-DVA and the campaign. Most non-Muslim members of JAG-DVA were of the opinion the "one-law for all" be compromised. This means that the DVA be applicable only to non-Muslims. This would mean that Muslims are to contend with the existing and inadequate protection under state Muslim laws or Muslims develop a parallel state Muslim law. The second option was unattractive as state courts (Syariah Courts or Muslim Courts) may not have strong enforcement powers. This defeats the rationale of the campaign that violence cuts across all ethnic and religious lines and protection must be in one law for all.

The problem was dramatically highlighted when a case went up to the civil High Court around that time. A Muslim woman lawyer who was battered could not get adequate redress (divorce and protection from violence) in the Muslim state courts. She purportedly left the religion in order to seek a High Court order to injunct her husband from beating her. Under a 1988 amendment to the powers of the courts under the constitution, the civil courts cannot hear a matter where the state Syariah court was given jurisdiction. Her case was thrown out. (After a prolonged extra-legal process of lobbying with policy-makers and political parties, she took her case to a state court in one of the 13 states which gave her a Muslim divorce).

JAG-DVA compromised with the AG in 1994. The marital rape clause would be dropped in order that the law can be passed and made applicable to all Muslims and non-Muslims. It was hoped that the issue of marital rape would be raised on a case basis and the principle of marital rape be developed as a court decision or precedent rather than by express legislation. The DVA was passed but not enforced for a year.

On International Women's day in 1996 JAG-DVA and supporters staged a peaceful demonstration in the city to highlight the lack of political will of legislators. As a result of wide media coverage of the protest, the matter was raised in Parliament (which passed the law earlier) and the law came into force in 1996.

### **Lessons learned**

- That it is important to identify where the inter-religious and intra-religious issues might lie in any given strategy in a multi-cultural community and develop strategies and actions accordingly

- It is important where rights of communities may be seen as conflicting that effective communication be set up to promote understanding of the issues in order that common strategies can be worked out to benefit all involved
- Networking and dialogue are essential elements to a sustainable relationship
- Participation of all key actors is important for success of a particular action
- Strategies are to target three main areas; cultural sphere, the substance of the reform/action and institutions simultaneously.

## 2. Freedom of religion issues

### (a) Conversion of one party in a civil marriage to Islam

All present day civil marriages comes under the Marriage and Divorce (Law Reform Act). In multi-cultural Malaysia spouses to a civil marriage sometimes become Muslims. Where only one party converts to Islam, the civil marriage provided no answer. In a very old case decided by the Privy Council in England (on appeal from Sri Lanka), it was decided that when a spouse converts to Islam, the conversion “automatically” dissolves the civil marriage. This principle is derived from an understanding of Islamic law. The husband in that case who became Muslim and had married a Muslim woman under Islamic law was held not to have committed bigamy.

This case applies in Malaysia as at one time, all decisions in Malaysia are appealable to the Privy Council.

This precedent proves unfavourable to the spouse who has not so converted to Islam as that civil marriage remains good and valid until dissolved under civil law principles. The “automatic dissolution” allows Muslims to remarry without needing to settle the status of the civil marriage with earlier spouses.

The Law Reform Act was subsequently amended to include divorce where one party has converted to Islam.

The amendment however does not solve many ancillary matters pertaining to the civil marriage in relation to custody of children, maintenance and division of matrimonial property. The Civil Courts are powerless without specific law on the matter. Most matters are settled by agreement. It becomes very difficult when parties do not agree.

### (b) Religion of minor children

In one state called Selangor, a state Muslim law provided that where one party to a civil marriage converts to Islam, all minor children are automatically Muslims. This created much unhappiness and parents are even moving out of the state for fear of their children being kidnapped by the converting Muslim spouse. The Prime Minister had to step in to re-assure Malaysians that the provision in that state law would not be enforced.

### (c) Conversions of Muslims into another faith or religion

In many states, state Islamic laws provide for conversion out of Islam but also include punishment for apostasy (counselling, fine and jail). In some states there are no provisions allowing for conversion out of Islam. In some states there are rehabilitation laws for deviants and apostasy.

In recent years, there are cases with lawyers where Malaysians who had converted to Islam to marry another Muslim may wish to return to their former religion upon divorce. Many wish to do this to ensure that their property would not devolve upon the state because there are no Muslim heirs (where they have no children). They may also wish to marry again to non-Muslim parties. As they remain Muslim on record, it is not possible to have a valid marriage, where one party is of a different religion under both Islamic and Civil Family laws. They risk being arrested for living together as it is an offence in several state Islamic law for a Muslim to live together (and have sexual relations) with a non-Muslim.

As there are an increasing number of cases of this nature, the matter was highlighted by lawyers in law conferences and raised at the Bar AGMs. Hands are tied as the Muslim law is clear—either there are no provisions to allow conversion or the person would face criminal sanctions if they so wish to convert out of Islam. There is no political will to sort these problems to this date.

What has happened is, the parties may live together but may not have children as their status is affected, or they emigrate to another country. The situation has created some tension and may likely to erupt or be manipulated as an inter-ethnic tension or inter-religious tension and this proves sensitive in a multi-cultural society.

In the last two years real efforts have been made by like-minded civil society actors of all religions and ethnic groups to evolve a civil society mechanism to address the problems on the ground on conflict of laws situations. It was suggested in one of these forums that an inter-religious council of civil society members be developed. One of the objectives of setting up a mechanism of this nature is to enable groups to come together to resolve these “sensitive” issues and to advise policy makers on actions to be taken.

#### (d) Rehabilitation law

Some states have passed Islamic state law on rehabilitation. This law applies where a Muslim applies to convert out of Islam, or when Muslims are found (arrested and charged) for being an apostate or a deviant.

Some laws contain elaborate provisions where the state is empowered to determine who is or is not an apostate or deviant. Some laws provide for a 3-month rehabilitation sentence. Some state governments are rumoured to have plans to build rehabilitation centres where those convicted are counselled for the length of their detention.

These laws are apparently contrary to the Qur’anic injunction that there is no compulsion in religion. The matter is in dispute as Muslims remain divided on the issue in Malaysia as to whether Muslims themselves are free to convert out of Islam.

Some Muslims have been charged for being deviants and apostates and their cases are up on appeal. These are also politically charged cases. Lawyers are testing the constitutional provisions on freedom of religion on the state laws on apostasy and devationism. So far these cases have not been very successful. There is no record of any person being rehabilitated todote.

In 2000 a lobby against the passing of a rehabilitation law for Kuala Lumpur was successful with the government “suspending” the passage of the bill into law.

### **Lessons learned**

- It is important for faith communities to remain transparent and to keep communication channels open
- Dialogue remains a key factor in the understanding of sensitive issues
- Solutions or strategies must begin from a shared notion of values in relation to justice and peace
- Networking in important in order to bring out to the public concerns affecting the community
- Participation of key actors, religious community leaders, activists and scholars are important in developing a common front

### **3. Insulting Islam laws**

The protection and preservation of the precepts of the religion of Islam has seen passage of laws against insulting Islam at the state level. These laws are vaguely drafted and much is dependent on the discretion of the enforcement officer or guidelines drawn up for that purpose.

One example of such a provision is Section 7 of the *Syariah Criminal Offences (Federal Territories) Act 1997*.

Section 7 allows the state to convict any (Muslim) person who “orally or in writing or by visible representation or in any other manner insults or brings into contempt the religion of Islam, or derides, apes or ridicules the practices or ceremonies relating to the religion of Islam or degrades or brings into contempt any law relating to the religion of Islam for the time being in force in the Federal Territories.” A conviction attracts a fine of RM3,000 or a 2 year imprisonment or both a fine and imprisonment.

Section 8 of the same Act punishes a Muslim if by his “words or acts, derides, insults, ridicules or brings into contempt the verses of Al-Qur’an or Hadith”. If found guilty, the offender faces a RM5,000 fine or imprisonment of 3 years or both.

In 2001 there were complaints made by Muslims against several NGO leaders, lawyers and commentators who are also Muslims. There was much publicity on the matter and the matter was finally sent to the National Fatwa Council and the Conference of Rulers. No one was charged but there was a caution made the spokesperson of the Conference of Rulers and the Fatwa Council on the matter.

The whole episode underlines the sensitive nature of the debate on Islam in the country.

## **Lessons learned**

- That free speech in good faith which does not blaspheme should not be criminalised
- A rigorous discussion and debate on Islam must not be criminalised as Malaysia is a multi-cultural nation and discussion on sensitive issues are necessary to foster understanding

### **4. Islamic state / Islamisation / Hudud laws**

There has been much publicity between the two main Malay-Muslim parties on the establishment of an Islamic state. There are views that Islam as religion of the federation does not make Malaysia an Islamic state. The Prime Minister had made a political announcement that Malaysia is an Islamic state on Sept 29 2002. This was seen to counter allegations by the Islamic party of Malaysia or Pas that it is not and Pas would restore the country into an Islamic state through the vote.

Pas won the state elections in two states; Kelantan and Terengganu. It has passed the Islamic criminal law on Hudud (with penalties for death by stoning etc) in both states. These laws are seen to contradict the constitutional provisions that state legislatures have very limited powers on criminal law. One case has been filed against the state of Kelantan (ruled by Pas) on the constitutionality of the Kelantan Hudud law. The case has not been heard.

Malaysians are concerned with the creeping identity of Islam in the socio-political life of multicultural Malaysia especially on these issues:

- Position of Muslim women
- Freedom of religion (Muslim and non-Muslim)
- Freedom of speech on religious matters
- Enforcement of Islamic morality on Muslims and non-Muslims
- Creeping Islamic identity in laws and policies

### **Conclusion**

The national narrative as to whether Islam is going to play a major role in the life of the nation is still on-going. It becomes imperative that an enabling environment is created in order that the people can participate in crafting the nation-state that they so desire.

Continued inter-faith dialogue among faith-based communities is essential to promote understanding and peace. The dialogue on islamisation or the Islamic state should not degenerate into a mere contest of political power among the political elites and political parties.



# Looking To The Future: “Living Together. How?” (Christian’s Perspective)<sup>1</sup>

by El. Anna Marsiana<sup>2</sup>

## People’s Struggle as the Context of Our Living Together

Allow me to start this paper with stories. For me stories, especially, true-life stories, the stories of the people are important as the people and their stories are the core of religious life. Let us listen to three stories below:

### *The Story of Kasiyem: a daily basis worker at a garment factory in Sukoharjo, Central Java.*<sup>3</sup>

Kasiyem, 28-year old skinny woman is a female worker in a garment factory in Sukoharjo. She comes from a rural area in Wonogiri. She was born to a poor farmer family. Being the eldest of three and at the same time a woman too, finishing her SMEA (equal to senior high school) was not in the priority. As farmers, just like many farmers in her village, her parents have only a small piece of land, unfertile, where her parents always have whether cassava or corn planted on it. Therefore she was once familiar with the hardness of life of the farming community, as she grew to a mature person in this agricultural community. As if it has become the fate of being farmers in Indonesia, they have to work hard and yet get small amount only for their handwork.

And now she is a daily basis worker at a small garment factory in the Solo peripheral. Prior to that she was working as migrant worker for 6 (six) years in Singapore and Malaysia. “I spent my first three years as domestic helper in Singapore, and another three years as a worker in an electronic factory in Malaysia before spending another three years as worker here in Solo (she likes to describe herself as now working in Solo instead of in Sukoharjo). If I had choice I wanted to remain in my village in Wonogiri rather than staying in big cities like Singapore, or Malaysia, or now in Solo. Though I am living in city, I am still a peasant people, (‘orang kampung’), I don’t want to spend all my mind and energy for something that I believe is beyond my ability to get” (‘tidak mau ngoyo’). As additional information, when this interview was made (December 2000) Kasiyem received Rp.14,500-17,500/week (Rp.58,000-70,000/month) based on how much she could finish her work in the paid week. She told me that it happens so because she is new worker and has neither knowledge nor skill on sewing. And from that wage she is paying a shared-room of Rp.30,000/month that she shares with her roommate, another worker at plastic factory, Rp.15,000 each.

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<sup>1</sup> Presented during the Consultation on Inter-Religious Cooperation in Asia: An Interfaith Endeavor to Learn from Each Other’s Wisdom to Live Together

<sup>2</sup> The writer is currently working at a Church-based NGO, YBKS, Social Welfare Guidance Foundation, in Solo as the Head of Secretariat Bureau and at the same time the Acting Director and is member of the National Board of YMCA-Indonesia. She is also program-coordinator of an ecumenical feminist movement, Serikat KPS.

<sup>3</sup> The story was taken some time in December 2000.

***The Story of Tiur, A worker at a 'Nike' Shoes factory in Tangerang, Jakarta.***<sup>4</sup>

Tiur, 30-year old female worker, Batak by ethnic, is a very outspoken person.

“I came from a poor family; my father, a low-ranked soldier, lost his job after refusing to be sent to Irian Jaya (writer: now has been renamed as Tanah Papua) when I was still at senior high school. I left my hometown for Jakarta in 1997, believing that Jakarta is the place to find opportunity to have better life. I did not regret for leaving my parents, brothers, sisters and relatives in kampung halaman (hometown) but what I regret is that life in big city like Jakarta has never been the same again as I had once in kampung. Brother/sisterhood in kampung is still very strong, but it is not the case here in Jakarta. Besides, the seems to be big amount I get from my hard work – she says that she works approximately 12 hours/day - is many times not enough to pay even my basic needs. After five years joining this company, I get a wage of little higher than a minimum wage standard, Rp.650,000. Then if I take overtime work I will get extra income about Rp. 275,000 to 600,000/month. Only then can I save some amount and send it to kampung. But it means hard work for me. In the past I often took overtime work, and was even happy to do that. I worked about 16-20 hours/day. Now, I reduced my overtime work. It doesn't necessarily mean that I have already enough money. This is rather because I understand that a struggle needs sacrifice. I decided to work until 6 PM, from Monday to Saturday. From 6-8 PM I make myself available for labor movement activities. Sunday is for Church and resting. Besides, if I had choices, I would not have chosen to work overtime even though it gives me more money. If I work overtime everyday, my body gets weaker everyday, and then I feel sleepy at work. And you know, it is very dangerous if you fall asleep while working; the machine will eat you up! Our daily target itself is already very hard for us to achieve, very inhuman. We - workers - work like machine.

For you to know, we work in a room so crowded with more than 1000 workers, with neither sufficient air ventilators nor fans. In that crowded and hot room, there are only 9 comfort-rooms but only 7 are functioning”

***The Story of Acehness Woman***

One Acehness woman in her middle age shared this story to a group of women that was advocating her. She was molested and nearly to be raped by a respective head villager in his visit to her house ‘looking for her husband’, he told her. She was threatened not to tell any body else or else she would lose her husband for being accused as member of Free Aceh Movement (while the fact is that her husband has no connection at all with the FAM). Fearing that she would lose her husband she kept the embarrassing experience for herself, telling herself that she is not the only woman who experience that terrible thing! Very unfortunate for her, her husband heard the story from people who accidentally witnessed the accident. Instead of defending and protecting his wife, this husband was mad and accusing her as bad and unfaithful wife and threatening to divorce her. He said, he was so embarrassed to have a wife like her. (Flower Aceh, 1999)

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<sup>4</sup> The story was taken in August, 2002.

Kasiyem, Tiur and the un-named Acehness woman are a real picture of our society today. Their stories are our stories. They are the most vulnerable in the society, marginalized politically and economically. And yet, to me their stories are also still the stories of our future unless we do something to stop the economic and political evils that dominate our world today.

The globalization ideology has allowed a few developed countries to dominate the developing and under-developed countries, resulting the poor: farmers, workers, and women especially, to become poorer. Both as farmers in the rural community and workers in the urban community, they are becoming more and more marginalized. Especially in Indonesia, where the chemical fertilizers and pesticides prices are controlled by market following the capitalistic system, while the price of rice is controlled by government so that the whole nation can live over the sacrificing and suffering of the farmer.

For the sake of economy, we are taught to excuse ourselves for destroying our environment. Farmers are the ones who first have to suffer when the earth is sick. Isn't it ironic that there is no food for those who produce food for the people in the city? And yet this happens often! Kasiyem and the rest of the family are just one example. This is the fate of being farmers in the South, in the time of globalization. For the sake of economy of those developed countries farmers in the developing and under-developed countries are asked to compete with farmers in the developed countries, which we know that they will never be able to compete with them. We all know that.

How about the workers, we may ask. The story of Tiur is a perfect story of situation of a worker under the pressure of global capital with TNCs and MNCs that only weakens the bargain position of small factories and their workers, again, in the South. Kasiyem and Tiur are but victims of this unjust system. Eventhough Tiur sacrifice her overtime work for the labor movement struggle, it is easy to predict that the struggle will ask her to sacrifice more. This is true for as a sub-sub-sub contractor, the factory owner is living under pressure of the sub-contractor and the contractor as well as they can easily end the contract and move the factory to other countries with lesser risk.

For the sake of economy a war is given reason to give a more human face as if there is just war! Although more than 2/3 of people in the world are calling for the US not to go for war against Iraq, the George W. Bush' administration and his allies insisted to go on with their plan. The Acehness woman's story is the story of many people, especially women, in war-situated regions/ countries. We surely have to pay great respect to the people's struggle for self-determination like that of in Aceh and other regions/countries, and in fact have to seriously take it into our consideration when talking about living together. But we have to take too the condition of the innocents, the vulnerable, in conflict or war situations like that of in Aceh, Ambon, Poso, or Iraq.

Listening to and understanding their stories are therefore very important. Living together with people should always mean living together with these suffering and yet at the same time the struggling people; the people of different religious beliefs and yet having the same mission for their lives, i.e., to have life in its fullness.

**We Believe In Works and Not In Words!!**

“If a brother or sister is naked and lacks of daily food, and one of you says to them, “go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill”, and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? So, faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.

But someone will say, “ you have faith and I have works”. Show me your faith apart your works, and I by my works will show you my faith...

For the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead.” (James, 2:15-18, 26)

After listening to their stories, I cannot but to come to this reflection, i.e., the Christian should take the above passage seriously and reflect it in our daily life. For these people, life means work. My experience in working with grassroot people taught me a very deep lesson. Go to them and talk, and they won't listen! Go to them and join in their work, their struggle, and the real dialogue will take place.

Without works, religion is only empty words with no meaning. Without works, religion begins to divide people. An old saying says that “words, with small “w” divide people, but works unite them”. It is in works, I believe, religion find it's meaning. We have witnessed in our lives, millions of people have died simply because of their religions. They killed each other, lived in hatred, ironically simply because of their religions! This is true especially in the case of Indonesia where SARA (S=suku or *ethnic*, A=agama or *religion*, R=Ras or *race*, A=aliran/Antar golongan or *classes/groups*) has been deliberately managed as sensitive issue to maintain the status quo of those in power, especially during Suharto's era.

Words with small “w” create elites, ruling class who has the authority to say the words, and the listeners, the ruled, who are only supposed to listen to what they say and order. But in works there is neither the ruler nor the ruled. Following James' line, they are now having equal status, called as the believers, people who have faith and live out their faith, no matter of their religious beliefs.

There are already quite numbers of inter-faiths dialogues done in the level of discourse/theology. And as a result we have many theological (and political too) statements and of course the elites who take benefits of them: ruling parties, government, and religious authorities. I am not saying that religious dialogue in the discourse level is not important, no! But what I am trying to say is that without translating the discourse to the concrete actions, not only that the dialogues have no meaning for our living together, but also that the dialogues only serve the interest of the ones in power.

This is also not to say that works are then entirely separated from words. This is because works make praxis to become possible. Works turn the dead words to become alive as a meaningful expression. Works turn the elitist dialogue to become living dialogue. In other words, this is simply to say that *orthopraxis* has to come first before the *orthodoxy* when it comes to the question of how we should live together with people of different religious beliefs. This is the great lesson I learned from living with the grassroot people.

## **Living Together. How?**

### ***Open Community As Living Dialogue***

Now let me tell you another story, a story of my beautiful memory of my childhood. We were living in a small town, Sragen, part of Central Java Province. I could still recall that at that time

people of different beliefs and religions mingled together. As a child I was sent to Sunday school and encouraged to join all church-activities by my mother although she herself was at that time still a *Kebathinan* or *Kejawen* follower. Only later on she embraced Christianity when she found that she could be both Javanese and Christian at the same time. (But recently she confessed that she never discussed the matter with her pastor).

We were living in a simple house and simple life as our neighbors were. Unlike today, our houses at that time were exposed to each other. No walls, (*Jv. pager*) were built up surrounding our houses to prevent people from seeing through the inside of our houses: the contents and the activities inside the houses. Rather, it was common that in front of each house, the people either made “*bok*” (a bench made of cement-bricks) or put “*lincak*” ( a bench made of bamboo). When the night is still young or during full-moon night, people, men and women alike, would sit on one of the benches exchanged stories and foods too. On top of the *bok*-head, my mother always put “*kendi*”, a terracotta water jar, full of drinking water every morning. Sometimes she asked me to check it out in the afternoon as whether we need to fill the jar with more drinking water or not. The idea is that passers by are invited to feel free to stop by anytime and to fulfill their thirst after making some journeys. That was part of our ritual everyday. That is also still the ritual of many rural communities nowadays. The “ritual” was - and still is - done following the Javanese wisdom that ‘it is better to live in a house surrounded with *pager mangkok* (walls made of bowls) rather than in a house surrounded by *pager tembok* (walls made of bricks)’. I would like to call the community as the *pager mangkok* community.

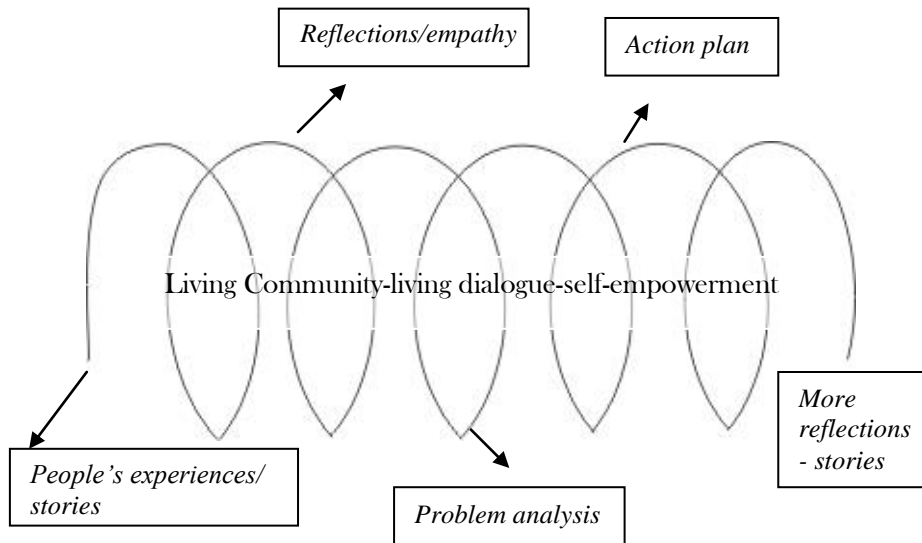
*Mangkok* is bowl, symbol of food. And food is actually symbol of life itself. The idea of *pager mangkok* wisdom is that life is a blessing; the more we share the more we are blessed.<sup>5</sup> **First**, we have to share whatever resources we have, firstly to our closest neighbors, but secondly, also to any body who needs it even if we don’t know her/him personally, e.g. the passer by. **Second**, as food is symbolizing life itself therefore the sharing resources is not done without involving the emotion, like –sorry to say—when we offer our money in Sunday worship every Sunday. It is with caring. It is with love. The *pager mangkok* wisdom teaches us to live in the value of caring and sharing. **Third**, in the *pager mangkok* wisdom, we are taught that we are one community, regardless our religious beliefs, we are related to each other, responsible to each other. What a beautiful idea. In the past this idea has helped me to understand my faith as Christian better as it is said in the Bible that Jesus has come that all has life in its fullness (John 10:10). How can we have life in its fullness if there is no sharing of resources and life? The *pager mangkok* community teach more how to understand and make possible what is reflected by John about Jesus’ mission in and for the world.

To me the *pager mangkok* community is a model of a dynamic and living dialogue where the words are not separated from the works; where words find their concrete expressions; where the hermeneutic spiral of experience/story – reflection/empathy - analysis – action – reflection – experience/story take place; where the real orthopraxis becomes possible and is done not in a structured way. The story exchange which usually is also accompanied with food exchange becomes a media where the emotion, ratio, and body meet and make a real-living dialogue.

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<sup>5</sup> This idea is very much rooted to the Javanese cosmology. Human beings, no matter their religious beliefs, as microcosms are living in inter-related with others and with the macrocosms. The Javanese has no idea of material as something that can be accumulated. Material is understood as part of the macrocosms where we are living. Therefore, destroying the macrocosms is understood as destroying the microcosms itself. There is much wisdom derived from this cosmological concept. Accompanied the *pager mangkok* principle is a Javanese saying, “*tuna sathak, bathi sanak*” means, we can lose anything related to material, but not brothers/sisters. This is to say that above all is human relationship.

Using Gruntvig's language,<sup>6</sup> the story and food exchange in the *pager mangkok* community is a kind of folkschool or even the real folkschool itself where the people listen to each other story, share empathy, analyze problems, plan action, and in return empower each other. The spiral below describes to us the living dialogue and how the empowerment process takes place.



More important than that is that the dialogue does not stop there but continue in the daily and real life like in the drinking water providing for the passers by. Here the water providing then goes beyond food providing. The water providing also serves as an invitation for further and deeper dialogue; a real-living dialogue. Who is s/he? Where s/he comes from? Where is s/he going? What is s/he after? What is her/his belief? Who s/he undertand what s/he believe? Why is s/he doing what s/he is doing now? And other questions that might follow. There again, the dialogue in praxis takes place. And once a dialogue takes place, a space for understanding others is created. (Here I see the complicated and long discussion/theory of communicative community of Juergen Habermas comes to a real.) (F. Budi Hardiman: 1993).

***YBKS As A Church's Endeavor for Caring and Sharing of Life: A Sharing Experience***

“In our struggle, we have met many peoples of different organizations. Among them is YBKS. We did not know that YBKS was a church-based organization until we came to Solo, to the office. The first feeling was, of course suspicion. But after being accompanied for almost 20 years of our struggle, we can share to everybody that any form of injustices is the concern of all religious people regardless what their religious beliefs are. We are Moslems, I myself am a Moslem too, and YBKS is a Church-based organization. We don't feel that we are being christianized. To be precise we never feel that the YBKS is trying to convert us to embrace the Christianity. Until today we are still Moslems”

<sup>6</sup> Gruntvig is a Danish Lutheran pastor who introduced folkschool as a method of people education; an education done by and for the people themselves.

The quotation above is repeatedly said by one of our cadres, one key person, in Kedung Ombo (for short KO), Jaswadi. YBKS<sup>7</sup> has been working with the KO people since 1984. It was as early as 1979 that the YBKS has insisted in many cases that she would not cooperate with churches in organizing particular program unless we invited other non-Christian organizations to join both in organizing the work and to participate in the activity. It was written in some of our documents that it was very difficult to get both the church and the non-Christian organizations to work together for a join activity both in the form of people's organizing or conducting training or workshop. Especially the church, it was and in some cases it is still difficult to convince the Church that it is part of our call as religious institution to always open and work hand in hand with other people of different religious beliefs, with other organizations and groups of religious beliefs.

This is a sharing only of what we have done and are still doing today, and our experience in relation with the Church and the people.

First, as a Church-based organization we have to be honest that many times we find ourselves in a quite distance with the Church, especially in the level of operational theology. However, I personally think, that it is still better that the Church, in our case is represented by three local congregations, has consciously founded this YBKS as an extended works of the Church in presenting herself in the world. This institution then plays a double role: representing the Church in living together and working with the people in their struggle and at the same time playing its role as an auto-critique for the Church in raising the awareness and enhancing the inter-religious spirit among the congregations. Simply to give us a closer picture of what we are doing I have put our program activities in an easy to read matrix as enclosed to this paper.

Secondly, regarding our relationship with the people, we have to be honest too, that it is not easy job. It is not easy to get trusted by the people. It requires patience and humble attitude. Besides, we have to admit here that how hard we try to be as flexible as possible in implementing our program; still our program is structured or at least semi-structured one. Therefore we could not expect that the dynamic-living dialogue as pictured in the *pager mangkok* community to come in its natural way.

Thirdly, still in relation to our working with the people we find that the grassroot community is very rich in many aspects but economy/material. Once we are there we will immediately find that what we have learned in schools are far from sufficient to embrace the richness of values, wisdoms, spirituality of these peoples. From this encounter I personally learned that my understanding of my own religion has been deepened and broadened by my encounter with them; with their different perspectives; with their living experience; from the dynamic and living dialogue with these struggling people.

### **Some Concrete Recommendations**

I am very much aware that we cannot just copy the *pager mangkok* community and place it into our society today. But we can still make it as a model for a living dialogue. The key word is the open community!

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<sup>7</sup> YBKS was founded on April 15, 1974 by three local congregations of Protestant Church, GKI, in Solo.

Samartha has once warned us that for today context, and moreover in the future, to be religious in Asia is to be inter-religious. (Samartha: 1996) And to be inter-religious requires us to have spacious heart. A heart that opens to differences and is humble to always learn from others. Unfortunately, the Church as any other religious institution I think, always tends to teach and not to learn. I believe it is no longer time for the Church as well as any other religious institution to think that she knows everything or that she knows better than others. She has to now learn how to be humbly learning from others. As I have mentioned earlier, teaching only creates new ruling classes. In return the Church only supports the continuation of hegemonic power of patriarchal structure. There are many beautiful ideas, wisdoms, and ways of life, to be found outside the Church/Christianity. One example is the Javanese philosophy of life like we discussed early in this paper; the *pager mangkok* principle and the *pager mangkok* community which I believe can also be found in many grassroot community in different parts of the world.

Secondly, The Church as institution really has to promote the living dialogue as a model for living together with people of different religious beliefs and cultures. A semi-structured program like that of YBKS is needed but is not enough. The Church really has to change its structure from very hierarchical and exclusive one to be more flat and flexible. Meaning its structure has to be able to accommodate relevant programs for the living dialogue to be possible.

Thirdly, the Church really has to provide a real space in its all aspects: physical, liturgical, and theological for the living dialogue to really take place. The physical space will immediately create a warm feeling that people will feel free to come and be part of the community in this very physical understanding. This requires a change of architecture of the building among many other changes. The liturgical space will help the congregation to integrate their worship with the real life and struggle of the people. This somehow helps them to always realize that they are part of the bigger community. This is important as I feel that our liturgy today is more alienating us from the real world than helping us to realize and integrate ourselves to the world. The theological space helps them to deepen their understanding of others and in return their understanding of themselves and their own beliefs. With this I invite us to discuss further on how we should live together today and in the future. Thank you.

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# **Some Thoughts Concerning Living Together in The Future: From An Inter-Faith Perspective**

**by Kanagaraja Kadamba Kanana**

In this presentation I intend to discuss the challenges and prospects of living together in the future from an inter-faith perspective drawing from our own recent experience in Sri Lanka.

Sri Lanka is the home of the four great religions of the world, viz., Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam and Christianity. Communities belonging to all four religious traditions have coexisted in this land for centuries. Throughout this long period of cohabitation they have enriched each other through countless ways. They have borrowed from each other in developing their language, customs and social practices. More fundamentally, they have coexisted through interdependence by entering into reciprocal relations of cooperation.

The Sinhala Buddhist community consists of a preponderant majority accounting for some 64% of the population. The Sinhala-Buddhist tradition has had a preponderant impact in the development of Sri Lanka. It constitutes an ancient civilization with distinctive achievements second to none. The Hindu tradition also goes back to ancient times. There had always been close interactions and cooperation between these two great historic traditions and communities. The Islamic heritage goes back to ancient times, while the Christian tradition dates from the time of colonial conquest some five centuries ago. Both the Islam and Christian traditions have also wielded great influence on the development of the Sri Lanka social formation.

In ancient times there have been violent conflicts between the North-Indian Aryan settlement communities and the South-Indian Dravidian settlements. These conflicts were based on political-territorial rivalries and not on ethnic issues. Yet, these conflicts had taken on a religious character given that these political-territorial rivalries were often divided along religious lines as well.

At the time of so-called independence, leaders from all communities worked together to establish a modern representative democratic state. It was at this time that the Sinhala elites attempted to monopolize state power by marginalising the other communities. The British also allowed this to develop according to the principle of divide and rule. Since then, following some 55 years of so-called independence, every successive government has applied policies of discrimination and systematic suppression of the fundamental democratic and human rights of the ethnic minorities and entrenching the hegemony of the dominant majority nation. These cruel manipulations produced division and polarisation among the various ethnic communities. The result has been a barbaric war of mutual terror and destruction between the Sri Lanka state and the LTTE for some twenty years. At present, the Sri Lankan political order is characterised by mutual distrust and alienation of all communities.

We have today inherited a deep moral, economic, political crisis. We have become a poor beggar country dependent on foreign aid for our survival. Poverty, unemployment, malnutrition and indebtedness are increasing. Drug abuse, child abuse, prostitution, bribery and corruption,

rape, divorce and suicide rates are increasing to record levels. All national resources and assets are being mortgaged. We are on a steady decline towards extinction as a country and as a people.

What are the structural causal factors for this crisis and decline. Is it a failure of our religious traditions? Is it that we have not been able to live up to the precepts of our doctrines? Is it human nature or Divine Plan that has reduced us to this pathetic state. My view is that it is not any of these. The fact is that the present global political order itself is based not on humanistic values that promote solidarity and coexistence, but on a competitive market that thrives on exploitation where the powerful must devour the powerless as a rule of survival. The yardstick of exploitation and profit rules our lives and we are forced to turn against each other as animals in the jungle. The present global political order has already brought forth two world wars of unspeakable devastation and destruction along with other countless wars of aggression. Weapons of mass destruction have been used to decimate and terrorise whole populations and people's. Now today, the United States has initiated yet another global war which could lead to a third world war which may destroy the planet earth and humankind itself.

In our country, after some 20 years of war, there is a peace process. But still some political forces are trying to sabotage it due to their own selfish interests. Foreign powers are also interfering to penetrate the country to secure their strategic interests in the region. Our national independence is at stake.

In this context, it is difficult to talk about living together in the future. The only way out, I believe, is to educate the people about their true dignity and value, and about their fundamental rights and empower them to fight for their liberation from the chains of their oppression. Only when people are motivated and organized to struggle for their own freedom can there be a peaceful democratic political order. Only the people who become conscious of their own power to transform themselves and the world can together uproot and overthrow the structures that generate violence and conflict and create a world without violence and WAR!

Religious leaders must step out of their spiritual cages and go among the people and raise their awareness so the people are motivated to overcome all their divisions and barricades and unite to create a new world free of all exploitation, injustice and oppression. Religious leaders must come together with an inter-faith approach to work towards a universal set of principles for organizing human society and struggle to achieve a liberating social order with the people. The oppressed people is the hope for living together in the future and we must serve them and help them to realize their true power and capacity to inherit and rule the earth.

## **Peace and Hinduism**

In Hinduism it is the mind that is considered to be the prime cause of bondage, as well as misery and liberation, enemy and friend. Mind is our link to the world outside as well as a link inner peace. It all depends how we make use of the mind. By itself mind is neither friend nor foe, nor good or bad. It is up to an individual, which it shall be. If the mind is attached to sense pleasure then it is our greatest enemy. We do not need to fight an enemy outside in the world as we are carrying it with us no matter where we go.

Sometimes people think that they can find peace in a solitary place, in the forest, on top of a mountain, at some holy place, or in a monastery. But this is myth, if we have no control over our mind. However, if mind is restrained then peace can be found even in our own living room. Therefore, Hinduism has laid great importance on restraining the mind.

Lord Krishna gives the peace formula very succinctly in the following verse, "He who lives devoid of all attachment, giving up desires, egoism, and sense of I and mind attains peace." (Bhagavad-gita 2.71) Peace is not an object outside of ourselves that we need to attain. It is already there within us. But we have created disturbance by innumerable material desires. We work day and night only to bring anxiety, tension and frustration for us because we are chasing the chimera, of material desires. The material desires are endless like a bottomless pit. They never come to an end. As soon as one of our desires is satisfied it gives birth to further desires. Then we begin chasing these new desires and this goes on for all of our existence. It is just like a mirage in the desert. As soon as you can keep running after it until you drop dead from thirst. Trying to satisfy material desires is like trying to quench our thirst by seeking water from a mirage or by trying to put out a fire by pouring fuel into it.

Mind is considered the king of all senses. Therefore, it should rule over the senses. But if it becomes attached to the material desires it becomes a slave to the sense. When this happens the mind loses its potency. If a master has some weakness and a servant knows it, then the servant will take advantage of the master by exploiting the weakness. The master also fears that if he does not submit to the will of the servant then the latter can expose his weakness. Therefore the master is always dreading his servant. A mind attached to material desires and sense pleasure is in a similar position. Instead of controlling the sense it becomes pulled in different directions by sense. This is the cause of disturbance. Disturbance is nothing other than the sense or material desires pulling the mind all around.

Peace is realized when the mind is not agitated by material desires. If a person is walking and says, "What do I have to do to be stationary?" the simple answer is that he should not just stop walking. He does not have to do anything extra to become stationary. Rather he has to give up the activity of walking. Similarly, nothing special has to be done to gain peace. The peace is already there. We have to merely stop creating disturbance. And this is possible only by renouncing all material desires by becoming Nishpraha and free desires. This will bring an immediate end to all agitation of the mind. A man closed his fist and was going around inquiring from others, as to how to open it. All he had to do was to not keep his hand closed. Peace is a natural state of mind. If we stop disturbing it peace will naturally be realized.

Therefore Lord Sri Krishna advises us to forsake all material desires. Even if there is one desire, it will be disturbing and give rise to other desires. So desires must be renounced completely. The next thing He says that we should not identify with our designations, based upon these material bodies. This will bring peace in the whole world. There are wars between people, family members, religions, organizations, states and nations because of ego based material identifications. Unless we give up the thought of that we are a person of a certain caste, creed, gender, color, or nation, we will remain sectarian and thus have biased feelings for those who have a different designation. In this verse Lord Krishna is giving the formula for both individual

and universal peace. We must realize the fact that we are not this body we possess but are the soul who is distinct from it. This is one of the fundamental teachings of Hinduism.

The last requirement for peace, according to Lord Krishna, is to renounce the feeling of possessiveness over the body, people and things related to the body. This includes insentient things such as house, car, etc., and sentient being such as mate, children, etc.

Does this mean that one should not possess anything? No! the problem is not with the body or possessions but with our attachment to them. Attachment to anything will bring bondage, distress and loss of peace and happiness.

Based on the above principles of peace, Hindu society was fashioned to keep the mind in control by remaining detached from material desires and material objects. Mind is part of the body and therefore it is influenced by whatever is ingested by the body. Food has a great impact on the body. Vegetarian food is conducive to one having good health and peaceful mind. Similarly intoxicants contribute to poor health and a disturbed mind.

These are completely forbidden in Hinduism. The food, cloths lifestyle, the festivals and the sixteen samakaras beginning with garnhadan were all designed to keep the mind sane and controlled. The Varnasrama system was established so that a person could become fully renounced at the last stage of his or her life and thus attain everlasting peace. Without peace there can be no happiness. In conclusion: if we want happiness, we should follow the principals of the Bhagavad-gita. These are universal principals, which are applicable to every human being and not just for Hindus.

## **Some Thoughts from Buddhism for Living Together**

**by Lapapan Supamanta**

His Majesty the King of Thailand once spoke to the press that he wishes his reign not to appear in the history page. To him, history only records events such as wars, conflicts, disasters, holocaust, etc. The peaceful time is often quiet or not much mentioned. It seems that the time human beings can live together in peace is rare. However from time to time we see examples that convince us that peaceful coexistence is not only something possible, but a must.

According to Buddhist belief, living together is not only out of morality but also out of necessity since thing could only exist as dependent upon existence of other things. Nothing can exist alone. That is, thing is under “Dependent origination” rule. Besides, living together does not involve only human beings, but all beings are included. Therefore, the right attitude toward coexistence must be maintained so as to assure mutual benefit of all beings.

This paper attempts to look at why people could not live up to this ideal state of harmonious co-existence, at an individual and social level. Then, a brief analysis based on some Buddhist ideas is explored. The last part will propose some suggestion from a Buddhist stance.

### **Obstacles to Peaceful Co-existence**

An important factor that obstructs co-existence involves a great deal the notion of self (*atta*) and defilement (*kilesa*). That there is no permanent self is contrast to ordinary understanding. In order to affirm existence of one's self, the mind creates "the other's", as distinguish from one's own. When one encounters the other self, duality of "I" vs "you", "mine" vs "yours" is constructed in people's mind, differentiation and comparison arises. No matter superiority, inferiority or even equality, all kinds of attachment to and differentiation of self bring about sufferings. This is a case for envy, jealousy, arrogance, hostility, wrath, etc., to name just a few.

Furthermore, the three major defilements – *kilesa* (greed, hatred and delusion) play an active role in conditioning people's perception of things. Untrained mind tends to see things not as they really are, but distorted. People cannot see that all beings are comrades who suffer the same inescapable sufferings of birth, illness, decay and death, who seek happiness and avoid torment. Tinted with desire to satisfy one's self, one begins to value things and want to possess. Possession and accumulation only for one's own pleasure, enforced by ignorance of interconnectedness, will cause sufferings. For one to gain more and more, other will hold less and less since wealth, materials or resources are limited. Competition between those who gain and lose will be followed by hate toward each other and then violence. Living together then becomes difficult.

When self is fortified by creation of other self and perception of the latter is distorted by defilement, compassion, loving kindness, sharing, tolerance and other qualities that could cohere human beings together is fading.

Looking at collective level, as individuals share their living in a society, not only each person's *kilesa* contaminates one's perception. There is some more. We can see that in each community, there is a great deal of common values, culture, symbol, ideology, etc. that influence the members' collective consciousness.

Take Thailand in the era of Communism-phobia for example. Communism was portrayed as demon aiming at destroying our country, demolishing Buddhism, and dethroning our monarch. State media cited everyday nationalism to guard against communism. Students at school learnt to hate communists. Even monks were used by state preaching that killing communist entailed no sin. The outcome is, perceiving that they are not the same as us, different from us, and harmful to us, Thai people were convinced and were able to kill other Thai fellows for the sake of national security.

We can see that the defiled consciousness is within leaders of a society and also in institutions in that society, e.g. education, media, politics, religion, economic, etc. Both leading figures and social structural institutions have strong influence over perception of individuals in that society. Social reality as interpreted, preached, reproduced by both influential entities, shape citizen's mind through a set of language and symbol to think, to view and to have attitude in the same

direction without questions. If the collective social consciousness is benevolent to living together, that's fine. But, there are many cases that they disturb peaceful co-existence. You can think of stereotype, mockery and discrimination against ethnics, sexuality, belief, political ideology, etc. in your own society that members are spellbound.

### **The leverage point**

According to Buddhist teachings, ordinary folks are easily under control of misperception because their mind is not aware of how the perception is conditioned. Dependent origination rule tells us that, the critical point is the point of sensory contact. When sensory contact takes place (eyes with object, ears with sound, etc.) personal defilement and social consciousness are at work quickly to interpret the meaning, form perception in our mind and cause feeling - pleasant, unpleasant or neutral. Craving and clinging follow, then. The mind that is dominated by craving and clinging will create attachment to sensual forms, view, behavior and identity that is distorted - reality perceived is concocted according to influence of the defilement of that person and of the society that one belong to. The ignorance contact will determine behavior of people. If ignorance contact is allowed to happen that followed by craving and clinging, ignorance tend to be perpetuated, then people tend to be under harmful impetus for their action.

Followed this analysis, therefore, attitude, view or behavior whether they are to promote or to bar co-existence is a consequence of people's perception of reality. If peaceful co-existence is what we want, we need to make sure that our perception is not distorted or influenced by negative consciousness. To do so, religious practice is at hand to help. In this paper, I will share from Buddhist background, since Buddhism is one that is interested a great deal in mind and mental process that forms perception.

### **Be mindful to what arises in mind**

As action follows perception which is a consequence of ignorance sensual contact which is influenced by personal defilement and social consciousness, it is important that people need to be free from personal defilement and social consciousness at the point of contact. To be free deals with the mindfulness to watch and beware of what kind of concoction arises in our mind.

At the social level, this is also important for it is extremely difficult for citizen to realize what influences their mindset. If citizen could develop the mental ability and critical thinking to as to be aware of social reality that is negative to co-existence, they could be able to expand their consciousness beyond the socially conditioned consciousness. This is the critical first step that citizen be able to question, examine, and evaluate the meanings of language and symbol reproduced by social institutions. They would be able to single out what is benevolent to social harmony, and keep it, and what is not, and challenge it. Such ability cannot be obtained from intellectual learning alone, it must be sharpened by religious practice of mindfulness, concentration and insight training so as to break through negative symbolization, language, culture, ideology, norms, etc. that heavily restrict the citizen.

### **Guidelines for harmonious living**

Buddhism does not have things like commandment. Instead we have guideline of behavior (sila) that the Buddha encourage us to contemplate on. If we agree, we will comply ourselves to those guidelines. The fundamental idea of precepts is to make ourselves harmless, or to reduce the possibility that we are harmful to other. This will ensure individual-to-individual contact to be

in normality. As a consequence, we will benefit from harmless relationship, understand the interconnectedness and make ourselves a factor for harmonious co-existence.

The lay Buddhists refer to “the Five Precepts”, which is the minimum requirement for peaceful community. The guidelines mentioned hereunder invite us to contemplate on their benefit from practicing them.

1) Refraining from taking life of all forms and preserving lives. The first precept encourages us to think also about bio-diversity, non-violence culture and rights of all beings to exist on this planet in their own way.

2) Refraining from taking what is not given, and practicing generosity. It does not only make us to respect rights of others over their possessions, but also to question seriously about the centralization and control over resources depriving some people from even simple livelihood and unjust acquisition of wealth.

3) Refraining from sexual misconduct, and practicing respect for women and responsible relationships. This precept puts emphasis on right relationship, starting from relationship with one’s own self and body to relationship with family. This prevents people to get into relationship just for a mere sexual drive that hurt all parties concern. Instead it promotes relationship based on respect, responsibility and commitment. It also expands to issue of respect for women.

4) Refraining from false speech, and practice constructive communication. It promotes truths and responsible communication.

5) Refraining from falling into intoxicated state of mind, and practicing clear perception and awareness. The basic idea is that one must stay away from all kinds of intoxicants causing mindlessness - ranging from alcohol, drug, tobacco, news, advertisement to anything that enchant us so that we are not able to have clear mind.

### **Sharing**

People are encouraged to develop up to their potentiality. But people’s potentiality differs, some are more able and can gain more, while some are less. The idea, therefore, is to reduce the gap between the have and the have-not so that the society can stabilize. This is primarily to ensure material adequacy for necessity of all members of society. The mechanism is called “dana” which means sharing, helping out, or donating. Sharing can be in forms of material, time, knowledge, advise, charity etc. Even merit can be shared! It helps to strengthen friendship and to tighten community life.

We can easily think of the superior doing charitable action, e.g. giving away money, etc. But for the suppressed people, it is critical that they could cultivate the highest form of dana, that is abhaya dana (to give fear away). Only when the suppressed can be aware of contaminated consciousness and go beyond the obsession of fear, wrath or hatred, they can cultivate inner strength, can concentrate and see clearly the causes of the problems. This of cause involves a lot of mental work of mindfulness practice.

### **Create a Society that Facilitates Coexistence**

I would like to argue that living together could be possible only in a society that allows us to do so. As mentioned earlier, social institutional structures and leaders are influential factors that determine whether we will have peaceful co-existence or discrimination against some fellow human beings. Although the first step is that citizen need to cultivate critical thinking and question the existing social structures that perpetuate discrimination, the next step is to create a society that nurtures harmonious co-existence. Many Buddhist thinkers try to identify elements of society that are influential to this matter. We call it “*Dhammic Society*”. In short it is our effort to establish a society that is just, peaceful and balanced between materialist and spiritual dimension (not exclusively Buddhist, but based on core teachings of any religion).

Here are some ideas as a platform to explore further situations of each community. All elements are modified with “right”. The word “right” is Buddhist terms. It is not “right” in dogmatic terms. It means correct, proper, in harmony with natural law and in accordance with causes, purpose, time, space (community/society), all parties involved and one’s own self. The “right” is the one that promotes no attachment, no craving, no clinging, but facilitates harmless and normal relationship in a community.

#### ***Right religion***

The right religion is the one that serves as an instrument to transform practitioners, create inner strength, and encourage peaceful coexistence. It is not an escape, not a mere bundle of uncommunicatable rituals or superstitions, not soothing activities, not a form of brainstorming and not a blind faith.

In order to achieve this, the practitioners need to critically study teachings from different perspectives for social issues. It is not a kind of expertise research, but a critical reflection that all parties involved in the society are invited to participate. In this way we could accumulate piece-by-piece religious perspective on all aspect of our society. For example a perspective on wholesome business and ethical guideline can come from a group of businesspersons inspired by Buddhist teachings etc. Once we can see religious (in this case Buddhist) perspective on various social issues, creativity so as to make religion relevant to the sufferings of our time and space comes up.

#### ***Right education***

It is critical for a peaceful coexistence that education system is a participatory learning process that knowledge, talent, skill, understanding is shared in such a way that children and grown-up could discover potentiality, and acquire happiness and self-respect. It must be free from constriction of economic assumptions, political ideologies, narrow belief systems, patriarchy, and pseudo-science. It must be the one that cultivate both intellectual and intuition wisdom.

People in many countries are now aware that how formal education cripples and spellbinds people. It is criticized and challenged while the right to alternative education is called for. Popular alternative movement is growing everywhere, in a variety of fashion.

#### ***Right leadership***

If the society we live in is still an authoritarian in which citizen are controlled, oppressed, divided and conquered, and not allowed to mature, we cannot hope for a place for peaceful co-



existence. We need to transform the leadership into the one that direct people to the right direction; peace, compassion, mutual help, self-reliance, justice and other desirable qualities. The right leadership is important, as it is a model or inspiration for the people to live up to ideal state. Of course the way toward this must be nonviolent, not resort to all kinds of force and coercion.

We have to start form where we are. If the right leadership cannot be expected out there, at least in our small community, social action group, organization, we have to actualize and set an example.

### ***Right organization and government***

If we are to talk about living together, it is inevitable that we need to address the way our community or society is structured, that is issue of political and administration system. Popular political participation process is a point to emphasis here rather than the political struggle to take over power. This dimension of the society, when transformed to be “Buddhist (also other spirituality’s) right”, will ensure that all citizen have a say in the way one’s country is run and the purpose it is running toward. The preferable system must stay away from a self-center, individualistic, competitive regime with ritualized election and dirty power game.

Again, in order that we will be able to project this into the mainstream society, we need to experience it within our own small group. If the social action group is still bureaucratic, patriarchal and authoritarian, how can we go out and change the society at large to something contradict to our own organization?

In Buddhism, The Buddha formulated a *sangha* for his people as a form of decentralized, small-scaled community. This is one example that we can go back to study and get inspired.

### ***Right communication***

Communication is one of the elements that play a role of perpetuating ideology, social consciousness, symbol and language that shape citizen mindset. We need to be sure that this influential factor is in benevolent way for peaceful co-existence. We need to be watch out whether communication in our community spreads a true, honest, clear information. All voices in our community must be heard, all comment respected, all perspectives included.

In order to correct this element, we can actually do many things. Starting at individual level, communication, both reception and spreading of information must be done with mindfulness and critical thinking. Alternative media can be encouraged in our community as well as freedom of speech. In Thailand, we are struggling to have community radio station. It’s said to be illegal now as all radio and TV broadcasting is controlled by government or military, otherwise by business. But it is what we need to empower people with data and information. Also, critical evaluation of publicized information and news is one of the tasks to check out “wrong communication”.

### ***Right culture***

Culture is one of the elements that extremely influences people’s collective view and behaviour, and one that is difficult to transform. It might be arduous but we need to have courage to look into our culture and criticize whether it facilitates or hinders peaceful coexistence. If we could

detect any violent, abusive, cruel, discriminative characteristic, we need to challenge it so as to convey the wholesome value.

As a consequence of the first element, unless we are able ground our right culture based on religious reflection, we can be creative to make use of cultures – be they drama, songs, plays, etc. to be relevant to social issues and be active to take the role of fostering social harmony.

### ***Right sexuality and family***

This element is to establish a proper relationship both at personal level and inter-personal level. People need to understand and be at ease with their own body and sexuality in a sense that this is no alienation from one's own nature. Then, establishment of responsible and wholesome relationship with other persons can be possible. This is not at all a private business. Healthy sexuality and family are interdependent on healthy community and society at large.

There are some social values that shape citizen's outlook on sexuality, love and marriage to be under our scrutiny. Romantic whim may bar us from reality that marriage is a hard work that needs compassion and wisdom. Abuse of women and children is one of many myths that need to be challenged. So is the commercialization of women and pornography that portray women as an object, not equal human fellows.

### ***Right economics***

In order that all members of society get adequate material necessity to sustain their living, we need to have a right economic system. We cannot live peacefully in a society full of competition, extreme indulgence and extreme poverty.

The right economics must involve right production, right consumption and right distribution. It is important to think about benefit of simple lifestyle, sufficiency, efficient use of natural resources. This will also involve the proper and benevolent relationship about the rich and the poor, the producer and consumers. For the economic to be more humane, the rich-and-the-poor gap must be shrunk, fair share resources uses to be promoted and the producer-consumer distance shorten.

The communal or grass-root initiatives on alternative and sustainable small economic projects are blossom in every corner of the world. They need to be recognized and encouraged as one of critical factors leading us toward peaceful co-existence.

### ***Right ecology***

Ecology is home to all beings not only human, but only human beings hold enough capacity to harm ecology. It is therefore our great responsibility to keep such capacity in check and transform it into wholesome preservative effort for the sake of one's own benefit, for other beings', and for mutual benefit.

The right ecology is an element that interconnects with other elements particularly politic, economic and education. The most concern ecological crisis involves, I can say, practice to control and make use of natural resources. We need to liberate this element from the constraint of economic proficiency enchantment. But it must be managed in inclusive manners. Human beings, other beings, culture, value, etc. must be taken also into account.

Also, we can find creative ecological preservation effort by villages in many countries. Experiences in Thailand involve application of religious practices and rituals to protect lake, forests, rivers, etc. Religious personnel, monks and nuns, take active role in leading or inspiring villagers to take care of local ecological systems.

### ***Right play***

The approach to peaceful coexistence is not dull. It can be playful. In fact playfulness is one of human habit to reenergize us. However, we need to consider the way of recreation whether it is constructive or destructive. Whether our play, sports, game, entertainment promotes friendship or exaggerate malefic social discourses, discrimination, abuse, competition or violence that tear the society apart.

Examples in Thailand include a “Spiritual Entertainment Hall” in Suan Mokkha Temple, Chaiya, Surat Thani province of Thailand, and Dhamma Park Gallery in Lamphune province. Both examples display painting, poem, sculptures that express both pleasure and awareness. It is interesting if we can include artist and athletes in a process of rethinking about the right play.

### ***Right monitoring***

In comparable to mindfulness at individual level to detect misperception arises in the mind, society also need a censoring mechanism. It is to prevent from falling into the false track that might disturb peaceful co-existence.

Instead of having a few people to monitor the majority, we might need groups of individual involve in a participatory and transparent process to watch out what is happening in our society, to criticize in order to ensure harmony and diversity. This must be a learning process for benefit of public, not a control instrument.

In fact, there are plenty of examples. At international level, we have group to watch out in various issues, human rights, peace, ecological, etc. At grass-root level, many initiatives can be found also.

### ***Right community***

In an era that individualism is so strong as our time, we need to shift the emphasis and balance individual-community relationship. It is important to contemplate on interrelated nature of our beings and community at large. Our effort must be devoted to establish and nurture a harmony and unity in which diversity is respected.

It is important to note that community must have common direction and aspiration enough that all members feel of their membership, but not at all rigid uniformity. It must be flexible enough to care for diversity and differences. Also, we have to start from our own community and we can be strong and confident to stand for right community.

### **Buddhist attitude toward faith and interfaith**

As the twelve elements aforementioned start with religion, here I would like to share special note on this. Often religion is associated with faith. The closest word to “faith” in Buddhist terms is *saddha* which means “confidence”. *Saddha* is regarded a threshold when people decide to come closer to religion, in this case Buddhism. In a spiritual quest, one might encounter

myriad of teachings, get confused, shop around, and touch upon a bit of this and that teaching without going deeply into it. That's why we need *saddha* so as to stay put with one chosen teaching long enough to realize its benefit. Before one makes up one's mind to give a particular teaching a go, one needs to study well enough. Therefore *saddha* in Buddhism is no way a blind faith. A mere *saddha* is not approved by The Buddha, but it must be accompanied by critical inquiry and practice. This makes religious practice a process of critical learning to as to put out sufferings with *saddha* is only a first step. If singled out and cut off from the whole process, *saddha* is prone to be abused and become another misperception and discourse that promotes attachment to one's own belief and discrimination.

The Buddha never asked his followers to stick to his teachings or to follow without question. He always challenged us to try and mentioned that his teachings are just an instrument to help those who reflect and practice get out of sufferings. At a point that one is fully awoken, all teachings must be abandoned the same manner as a raft is abandon once one gets ashore. Only a fool carries the raft with him, which is absolutely useless. Even one's own religion at the end is to be abandoned it makes no sense at all for the Buddhist to attach to religion in such a way that it is emphasized as a cause for discrimination.

It seems to us that human beings have always been in trouble regarding how to live with people from different faith. Conflict and war related to different belief happened from time to time. We have to give this a serious though if we are to live together in peace.

Followed the rule of the Noble Truth, the only way to overcome trouble of interfaith is to confront it. That is, we need to go out and have dialogue with those with other belief in respectful way. By exchange, we can realize that, the other faith is just like one's own faith in the manner that it inspires and guides its follower to develop up to the fullest state of human beings. It is a source for ethical guidance for its followers emphasizing love, patience, generosity, tolerance, etc. all that good quality that is wholesome for peaceful living together. Of course the approach is different but their function means well.

One critical preliminary condition for the interfaith dialogue and understanding is that one must be serious in practice according to one's own faith. Only by practicing, one would internalize compassion so that recognition of the same quality but from different spiritual approach is possible. By and by one will transcend from superficial diverse right through the essence.

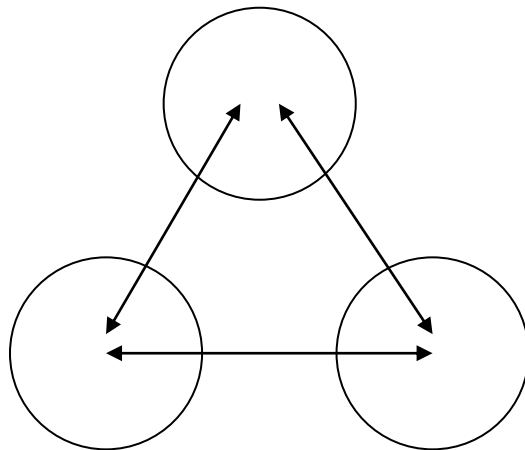
One way to look at diversity of faith is just like a medicine. Even for the same illness there is variety of medicine that works. But a patient takes only one kind that most suitable according to his/her condition. Similarly, I feel that Buddhism make sense to me. It fits my inclination, my nature. But for other people, other religion might suit them even better. So long as people get well from the disease by taking a particular medicine, it is ridiculous to fight over differences of active ingredient written in the label of medicine's bottle.

According to Buddhist belief, we human beings are busy already to overcome inescapable sufferings of birth, decay, illness and death. It is not a good strategy at all to add unnecessary trouble relates to different religions that obstruct peaceful co-existence. In fact religion of any kind is a critical factor that make people more righteous and competent to deal with other

individual and collective defilement manifested in forms of war, conflict, poverty, injustice, ecological crisis, etc. that put all beings not only human at jeopardy.

As a matter of fact, we all have to bear in mind that a peaceful co-existence is not an exception, but our very natural normality made difficult only by our own defilement.

**Object**



**Ignorance**

**Sensual Organ**

## **Challenges to Faith Institutions in a Troubled Global Order**

**by Hizkias Assefa**

Let me start by thanking the organizers of this meeting for inviting me to this consultation. I would especially like to thank Mr. Tony Waworuntu, who was instrumental for my participation in this meeting and for whose commitment to interfaith collaboration I have come to develop great respect. It has been a great privilege for me to be here and exchange experiences with you.

Before talking about challenges to our faith institutions, I would like to say a few words about the symptoms of the present troubled global order governing humanity. There are many symptoms. But given the limitations of time I will focus on just three which I chose from the macro systemic level. I am not claiming that these symptoms are the most critical, nor

problems at other levels are any less important. But I felt looking at the macro dimension would widen the scope of our discussions.

The first symptom that I would like to talk about comes from the notion that is increasingly getting currency in our times which asserts that “Might Makes Right!” The current Iraq war is a clear manifestation of this notion.

Of course, there is nothing new in this notion. The desire to dominate and impose one’s will on others by brutal force has always been present in human history. However, it seems that this notion is beginning to spin out of control. Human societies have long recognized the danger of this way of thinking. We have always known that power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely. The death, mayhem and devastation that have ensued from the quest for absolute domination over others and from the resistance of those who have been subjected to the domination have clearly illustrated that power unless tamed and controlled can bring the demise of organized social life. Our most recent example is the Second World War that resulted from Hitler’s desire to establish himself as the supreme ruler of the world and the resistance of others against this domination which led to the most devastating war yet in human history. To a certain extent a significant aspect of our progress in civilization has been our attempt to create mechanisms to control this savage tendency and make power accountable to higher values. Our advancement in politics, government, philosophy, religion, and ethics, have been attempts to contain our barbaric urges to dominate others by sheer force and create societies where reason, law, dialogue and mutual respect become central tenets in social relationships. Thus, over time, mechanisms have been developed to curtail dominating power through checks and balances, separation of powers, rule of law, democracy, in intrastate relations; and balance of power, collective security, international law, etc in international relations.

Although, our success in taming this desire to dominate has had mixed results, most recent developments in our global order seem to indicate a serious threat to the progress we have made and the institutions we have built in this regard. Since the end of the Cold War, the balance of power between the Western and Eastern blocs has vanished and the US has emerged as the unchallenged superpower. Many were hoping that European Union would emerge as the counterweight. But the recent divisions in Europe regarding the Iraq war seem to have diminished the likelihood, at least in the short term. Especially, since Sept. 11, 2001 we are observing an increase in the practice of Might Makes Right in its most blatant form. The superpower is acting as if it is beyond the reach of international law, and feels entitled to go thousands of miles away from its borders to invade a country because it does not like an individual leader who has imposed himself on his people and in the process kill those very civilians it said it is acting on behalf of. It feels it can do whatever it wants with absolute impunity. Although the rest of the world recognizes the injustice and illegitimacy of such actions, it is forced into silence and has been reduced to a helpless spectator full of rage and despair. At least in the past, there were some pretensions about consultations with the body politic, about building consensus, or about going through international organizations to gain legitimacy for one’s action, etc. Now those pretensions seem to have been abandoned and we are facing the crude practice of “Might is Right” in its naked form.

The tragedy is not only the inability of the rest of humanity to contain the action of one government, but also the precedent that is being established. If the US can do this and get away

with it, others will be tempted to do the same on weaker states, leading us all into anarchy and the law of the jungle. What is even more frightening is the new dimension the notion of “Might Makes Right” is taking. I am now referring to the “theory of war of preemption” which the US Administration is expounding. The theory asserts that if the US believes that somebody could be a threat to it in the future, it is justified to declare preemptive war and annihilate it, if need be, with nuclear bombs preemptively. This means that although Iraq is not currently threatening the US, it could be a threat one day; and therefore, the US can declare war and destroy it. Similar arguments have been heard regarding N. Korea, Iran and Syria. Who knows who is going to be next on the list --China, Cuba, France? With the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, we can imagine what the repercussions of this concept of superiority and domination will be.

Thus, as humanity we seem to be sliding backwards instead of moving forward. The notion of “Might Makes Right” is one of the dangerous symptoms of our increasingly troubled global order which calls for urgent response before humanity delves in a cycle of total mutual annihilation.

The second symptom which I would like to talk about is the selfishness, meanness and indifference of the current global order to the suffering of many within the system. Whether we like it or not, one of the consequences of globalization has been the creation of an awareness that as humanity we are sharing a common global home, called Earth, and that our fates as humanity are interconnected. We are coming to realize that despite our differences, we are increasingly interdependent economically, environmentally, politically, socially and even culturally, whether positively or negatively. This interconnectedness obviously comes with certain rights and responsibilities. However, when we see how we, the inhabitants of this common home, the Earth, are relating to each other, the indifference, meanness, and even cruelty of our interactions is astounding. To just give some examples:

We can say that 75 – 80 % of the Earth’s wealth as well as political and military power is controlled and enjoyed by less than 25% of its inhabitants, mostly concentrated in the Northern and Western Hemispheres. If one looks specifically at consumption patterns in the world, the richest 20% in the world consume 86% of the goods and services produced in the world, while the poorest 20% consume 1.3 %. This means that it is only 13% that is left for the remaining 40% of humanity. The richest fifth consume almost 60% of the world’s total energy and the poorest 20% consume only 4%. So you can see how the oil wars in Iraq, in the Middle East and elsewhere are being waged in the interest of the 20% of the affluent which consume almost 60% of the world’s energy.

In the 1960s, aggregate income of the countries with the richest 20% of the world’s population was 30 times as great as the aggregate income of the countries with the poorest 20%. By 1997, this gap had grown from 30 to 75 times. 3 of the richest people in the world make more than the earnings of 40 of the world’s poorest countries combined. In the middle of the 90s, the value of the assets of 358 individuals (billionaires) exceeded the combined annual income of 2.3 billion poorest people in the world (close to 45% of the poorest population of the world).

Given such a slanted distribution and consumption of resources, one would expect that justice and equity would require resource flows from those that are wallowing in wealth to the poor who are struggling with day to day existence. However, the contrary is happening. In terms of

real transfer of resources from the global South, in the 1990s for example, about \$41 billion came as aid to the South, while \$112 billion went from the South to the North as interest payment on debt. That is, three times the amount that came from the North went back North from the South. So, who is helping whom? Who is developing whom? The scale of net South-North transfers in respect of official and commercial global loans has exceeded anything previously ever witnessed including during colonial times. (Jan Scholte, *Globalization*, Palgrave: 2000)

In the meantime, overseas development assistance to the poor countries which had been on the average about 0.22% of GNP (a few Scandinavian countries have tried to push it to 0.7%) has declined to 0.10% of GNP for countries like the US. That is 10 cents out of every \$100.00 or \$1.00 out of every \$1000.00 to deal with the problem of global poverty and development!

As aid has become more and more miserly, new theories have been expounded that claimed that the best way to share prosperity with the South is through trade instead of aid. Yet, when one looks at how the rich countries protect their own markets while invading the markets in the South, one again observes the same meanness and cruelty: In the 1990s, trade barriers in the North against Southern goods were estimated to be twice as much as the value of all development aid coming to the South. What a great generosity! 7 countries of the G7 control 45% of the votes in IMF while about 190 countries share the other 55% .

In a nutshell, we live in a global apartheid (just like the way it was in South Africa) where the global South is relegated to second, third, and even fourth class citizenship.

At the same time, if one looks at the statistics revolving around how much humanity is preoccupied with the cult of death and self annihilation, it is also mind-boggling. If we sum up all the money that countries in the world are currently spending on arms and weapons, it adds up to about \$800 billion a year. Humanity spends about \$2.1 billion per day on arms. The US alone spends about \$400 to 500 billion a year, about 1.5 billion a day. This is separate from the supplemental budgets for the wars on Iraq or Afghanistan. On top of that, the world spends \$400 billion on illegal drugs and \$435 billion on advertisements per year. In sum, \$1.6 trillion a year are spent on arms, drugs and advertisements. So by the time we finish this conference, in 5 days, close to \$22 billion would have been spent on these three items alone.

While we are forking out so much valuable resources to buy arms and illegal drugs, look at the problems of poverty, child malnutrition, lack of access to proper health care, shelter, education in the world. World Vision International, a humanitarian and development NGO, has estimated that only a small fraction of these expenditures on death can bring a lot of life to many. Their estimate shows that \$22 billion a year could eliminate absolute poverty for children born in the new millennium by increasing their income from \$2 to \$3 dollar a day. \$8 billion a year could provide food for everyone by increasing food production, investment in rural infrastructure, better distribution and land reform. \$6 billion could provide primary education to all the children that do not already have access. \$9 billion could prevent disease and death in most poor countries by providing clean water to all without it. In other words, \$45 billion dollars a year would provide a livable income for the children born in this millennium, food for everyone, universal primary education, and clean water to all those without it. Just imagine what a different world this could be. And also notice that the \$45 billion can be raised just by putting a



moratorium on expenditure on guns, drugs and advertisement for 15 days, at most, one month. A moratorium for one month could totally wipe out some of these sources of pain and suffering for a majority of humanity! By eliminating these causes of suffering for the poor, we could also contribute to the creation of justice in this world and the reduction of conflicts which would make the accumulation of weapons unnecessary.

In a nutshell, what this is saying is that there are enough resources, know-how, and capacity to eliminate some of the root causes of human suffering such as degrading poverty, disease and ignorance, and the conflicts that arise from them; thereby creating a more just, peaceful and livable world. But, ironically, we lack the will to do so. We seem to put our faith in weapons to solve problems that our will refuses to address. This is the other tragic characteristic of our troubled global order.

An observer of our times, a military man at that, General Omar Bradley, one of the well-known American Generals of the Second World War, made the following insightful remark just after the end of the war:

"We have grasped the mystery of the atom and rejected the Sermon on the Mount. Ours is a world of nuclear giants and ethical infants. We know more about war than we do about peace, more about killing than we do about living." This is astounding especially when it comes from a General.

His superior, General Eisenhower, also made similar insightful observation in the following words:

"Every gun that is made  
Every warship that is launched  
Every rocket fired  
signifies, in the final sense,  
a theft from those who hunger  
and are not fed,  
those who are cold  
and are not clothed.  
This world, in armaments, is  
not spending its money alone.  
It is spending  
the sweat of its laborers,  
the genius of its scientists,  
the hopes of its children.  
This is not a way of life at all,  
in any true sense.  
Under the clouds of threatening war  
it is humanity,  
hanging from a cross of iron."

A third symptom of our troubled global order is the problem of political, social, and even religious leadership. It is amazing that at such a time of national and global crises of multiple

dimensions, we have a dearth of leadership. Where are the leaders that inspire us to become better human beings, to rise to our higher potentials and become compassionate people instead of pushing us to retreat to our lowest common denominators of greed, selfishness, fear, and hatred? If we look at the global arena, it is very difficult to point to more than a handful of leaders that have the vision, integrity, and quality to inspire humanity to transcend its self-destructive pettiness and meanness. Most of our political leaders are visionless, corrupt, addicted to manipulation and domination and are prepared to pay any price to cling to power. This is not only here in the East, or in the South, but in the North as well. Comparatively speaking, we probably have the most educated citizenry in the history of the world. How is it that such an educated populace produces the kind of leaders we have? Where are the Mahatma Gandhis and the Martin Luther Kings of the world when we need them?

In fact, when one looks at the post Cold War global order, given the dominant role the United States has been playing in it, the world would have happily acquiesced to its leadership if only the leaders of that country had the wisdom and the statesmanship to rise to the kind of leadership that the world needs at this time of crises. If they truly stood for justice, equality, rule of law, decency and compassion, if they created a truly global governance that was perceived as inclusive, fair and equitable, they would have not only been the leaders of their own country but of the world. Many of the political leaders in that country have been too ethnocentric and self-centered and have not displayed the breadth and depth of mind and spirit to become global states-people although they seem to be determined to rule the globe. They seem to confuse fear for respect. So the third symptom of our troubled world is this lack of transformative leadership.

### **Response**

We could identify other maladies and symptoms in our troubled global order. These three would have to suffice given the time we have here. When we stop and think about these problems, many extremely challenging questions arise. Why are we having all these problems? Why are the powerful pushed to such a sense of superiority of insane proportions? What is fueling the motives of the leaders? How far are people prepared to push their ego, greed and contempt for others before they create a situation which will destroy themselves? Where is the intelligence of leaders to see this folly, to see the limits of governing by pure intimidation? Why do we have so much resources and wealth but so little compassion? Why are our societies not producing leaders of integrity, vision and character who can inspire us towards our higher potentials than reduce us to our lowest and meanest common denominators? Why is it that our leaders opt for the more destructive routes when there are positive alternatives? Why is it that we are prepared to use bombs that cost multimillion dollars to kill people who live on \$1-2 a day? Why are our leaders devoid of wisdom but are adept in pursuing illusory short-term gains?

People have tried to provide answers to these questions from the perspective of politics, economics, sociology or natural sciences such as biology, physics, or the like. But I am afraid the answers or explanations given so far have been hopelessly inadequate. I feel the understanding and treatment of these problems go beyond the social or natural sciences. I believe what we are facing are not just intellectual problems but deep spiritual, ethical and moral crises. Spending billions of dollars per year for weapons and mutual annihilation in the

face of massive human suffering from hunger, disease, illiteracy, and lack of capacity to meet basic human needs; or nuclearizing the whole Earth - land, oceans, and outer space - for the purpose of dominating and intimidating others, is not a political, economic or sociological crisis, it is a deep moral crisis. As indicated before, we currently have the knowledge, resources, institutions, and capacity to solve many of the things that are causing human suffering in the world now. We have lots of resources, unprecedented in human history. But for some reason we decide to spend it on death rather than on life.

It seems that we are losing our anchor as humanity. We have lost our sense of who we are, what our purpose on this earth is, and what our rightful duties and responsibilities are in return for this marvelous gift of life. This confusion is becoming exacerbated by the so called modernization and globalization processes. The secular religion of “rationalism”; the self-centered, anthropocentric view of life and Earth; the instrumentalization of everything out there in the universe for the gratification of our greed and selfish satisfaction, seem to have added to these tendencies. At least when the world was less interdependent, if one pursued such suicidal and self destructive tendencies, the impact used to be limited to a restricted circle. Now with the world becoming smaller with globalization, the impact of one’s actions are not only on oneself but on everybody else as well. Bin Laden’s savage attack on the US is reverberating and affecting everybody else on the globe; and US’s response is affecting everybody in the world including totally innocent children in Iraq who are being blown to bits as we talk.

In this context, I feel that our religious institutions and leaders have failed to take their responsibility to help us understand this human folly, this human psychosis, and correct it. As I said before, the problems are beyond politics, economics, sociology and other sciences. Let alone remedy them, these disciplines cannot even adequately explain them. What we need is not more knowledge, but more wisdom. We probably have adequate knowledge if we were to use it wisely. I believe this wisdom might come from our religions and philosophical institutions rather than from our politicians, military officials, or merchants. Where are the loud and clear voices of religious people for sanity, for ethics, morality, justice and integrity in national and global governance? Where is the voice and leadership of religious people and institutions for harmony, wisdom, compassion, and joy in human interrelationship? Who could be better spokespersons for these higher order values than our spiritual institutions and leaders? Why are faith institutions squeamish and ashamed to talk about these values? Why are they not demanding their rightful place in guiding our human interrelationships while those who talk about death, selfishness and hatred have so blatantly claimed the social space only for themselves? Why is it that we have all succumbed to the rule of selfishness and greed as the modus operandi for the globe? Humanity needs to be helped to come to terms with these questions by its faith institutions and leaders.

How then can our faith leaders help us to understand these and similar problems and do something about them?

An important step in this direction is for them to assert their legitimate role in the guidance of human life and relationships in this world. At this point it seems as if they have surrendered that role to politicians, military strategists and economists, most of whom seem to lack the psychological, emotional and spiritual maturity to lead us out of the crisis we are facing as humanity. I want to be clear here. I am not advocating for theocracy. In most of the

theocracies we have seen in the world lately, I feel what people have done is to replace secular politicians by politicians from religious institutions who claim that God is only on their side. By making this claim, they disguise their selfish pursuit of worldly power and advantage, and give themselves a license to become more intolerant, divisive, and cruel. Those approaches create additional problems for our already ailing world than provide ways out.

So what does playing their legitimate function mean? How can this be done? I will discuss three ways:

1. One is for these faith institutions and leaders to be true to who they claim they are. I do not have expertise in world religions. But, from my limited knowledge and experience, I have not come across any world religion that does not profess justice, morality, integrity, harmony, compassion, wisdom, joy, humility, respect in human relationships, and the importance of disciplining the impulses of selfishness and greed. Although there may be doctrinal differences and differences in forms of worship, rituals, and legal codes, all great faiths of the world are preoccupied with helping human beings to aspire towards and be held accountable to these higher-order values. So, if faith institutions and leaders are true to who they are, they must uplift and amplify these values and make them central to the teachings and practice of their faith. They must revitalize them and teach about them in ways that are pertinent to the world we live in, and motivate their adherents to work towards them earnestly.

In other words, being true to oneself for these institutions and leaders means emphasizing and focusing on the profound spirituality of the faiths rather than on mere outward religiosity. This means going deeper to the meaning and essence of the religions, doctrines, dogmas, rituals and worship practices and going for what they are intrinsically about rather than staying at the surface and observing those rituals and doctrines as ends in themselves. When we explore the deeper meanings and essence of all great religions, we see that the values that we talked about earlier are the anchors of most of those doctrines and rituals.

2. For these faith institutions and leaders to assert their legitimate role means that they must lead by example. There has often been a huge gap between words and deeds among faith institutions. The values of the religions are only talked about instead of lived. When the followers see such hypocrisy, they become alienated, cynical and even despair about religion. Rather than providing an alternative moral force to manipulative politicians, religious institutions and leaders are viewed in the same category. In fact, from what I have observed in my work in many parts of the world, I believe there is now a great thirst for leadership that could inspire people to higher levels of moral and ethical life. But many of our faith institutions are responding to this thirst only by words and outward religiosity. Such an approach is hardly enough to transform the inner being that many are craving. It is when practice matches faith that faith institutions can inspire others to follow suit. Life speaks more eloquently and authentically than words when trying to inculcate values in others. That is why religious leaders are sounding rather hollow and are not succeeding in transforming humanity. It is when they become true examples of what they preach, when they show by their actions that these values are important and that it is possible to put them in practice in society (in fact, with very beneficial results) that their followers also become challenged to try. These leaders must be beacons of hope about the human potential, become shining example of moral leadership and compassion in an increasingly alienated and polarized world. This means also that religious

bodies and leaders should look at themselves deeply and critically and challenge themselves to change just as they seek to change the world. That is how humanity will begin to change and how the world will heal.

3. For faith institutions and leaders to be true to themselves and assert their legitimate role, it means showing mutual respect, cooperation and collaboration with other faith institutions and leaders. If they are trying to inculcate the values of tolerance, empathy, harmony and respect, which we said are intrinsic in all of the great religions of the world, then faith organizations and leaders should not only work together but should also be seen as working together. Their coming together publicly and openly, their visible cooperation, could inspire their followers also to break the artificial barriers that have fragmented humanity and created isolation, hatred, and demonization of each other. Especially when it comes to the common values identified earlier such as justice, compassion, peace, mutual respect, ethical life, subordinating greed and selfishness to humanity's greater purpose, they should be able to speak with one voice. They should advocate the incorporation of those values in public life. Since they would be demonstrating them by their words as well as by their practice within and among themselves, they would not be dismissed as hypocrites. That way, they would enhance their credibility and capacity to inspire when they begin to speak against the maladies of our troubled global order and when they come up with proposals for how to deal with them.

They should develop common programmes that would operationalize those values -- standing for the rights of the oppressed, being spokespeople for the voiceless, being the conscience of humanity, showing harmony by their solidarity and cooperation, showing their wisdom by providing enlightened alternatives to world situations and playing an active role to share this wisdom, etc. All these would show that faith institutions and leaders could provide sound alternatives to the current leadership dominating the global order.

In sum, given the moral and spiritual crisis facing our global order, delving into the depth of our faiths and bringing to life the values they stand for and operationalizing them by living them provides a strong antidote to the crises. Deep exploration of the spirituality of our faiths enables us to discover a very significant reality -- our "common humanity". My experience from peacebuilding work in different societies has convinced me that if we go deep enough in the quest of our spirituality, we can discover the unbounded reality of the oneness of humanity regardless of whatever national, racial, cultural, geographical, or religious label we put on ourselves. For me, what I call peace work has entailed exploration of the protagonists' deep spirituality. If done properly, it can enable the parties to go beyond religious, ethnic, class, political or other barriers and come to realize their commonality which becomes the foundation for building just peace and healing relationships.

Just to give you an example: I was once working as a peacemaker in the Cameroon in a conflict that had a religious (Christian-Muslim) component. I was talking about peace and reconciliation and made a presentation explaining the concepts from a Christian perspective. At the end of the presentation, one of the participants in the meeting, a Shiek, asked me what my religion was and I told him that I was a Christian. He remarked: "You may not know it, but from your presentation I could see that you are deeply Moslem." Some Christian participants in the meeting were uncomfortable by the remark, which was trying to give me a Moslem identity. For me, however, it was a great complement. Essentially what I heard

him say was that although I was talking about those concepts from my perspective as a Christian, he could hear them deeply as a Moslem as well. Although we came from different religious traditions, we were touching a spiritual base where we could see and understand each other at a profound level. It felt as if we entered the hall through different doors called Christianity and Islam, but ultimately, it was possible to meet at a common holy ground that could make us realize our deeper connections. I have experienced this in my work in interfaith situations in places like Afghanistan and Sri Lanka. That is what I call "realization of our common humanity" and in my view it is the true foundation for healing relationships. If we go that far, we will also be able to find a basis for meaningful and deep interfaith cooperation.

I would like to cite another example from Sri Lanka.

I have been working in Sri Lanka with leaders of the main religions in the country -- Buddhist, Hindu, Moslem and Christian to see what role they could play in the current peace process.

In this context, I was facilitating a meeting among these religious leaders in the city of Kandy which is the old political and religious capital of Sri Lanka and is considered one of the holiest places for the Buddhist faith. There is a famous temple and shrine there. The Relic of the Tooth of the Buddha resides in this temple.

Given that our meeting was taking place in such a historical city, I requested if it was possible to have a visit to the temple together. The Buddhist monks took our request and were able to arrange it with the custodian monk of the temple and invited us to come.

Just as we were preparing to go, we discovered one small glitch. There was a Catholic nun among us who wore a habit according to the requirements of her religious order. We discovered that she would have to remove her habit because when visiting a Buddhist temple one should not have shoes or head coverings. But according to her religious order, she was not allowed to take off her habit in public. So in respect for our hosts we decided that she could not go to the temple with us. But she was so eager to go. She considered it a great opportunity for her just to see the temple. She said that even if she could not come inside the temple, she would stay outside for us because she could still enjoy the architecture and garden of the famous building.

So we all got there, but we had to leave her behind as we were going into the temple. It was very sad that she could not be part of the group. She also happened to be one of the very active and insightful members of our group. One of the Buddhist monks, however, felt that there must be a way of getting her to come. So he and another monk from our group went to the custodian monk and explained to the latter the situation of the nun. The custodian then replied to them that they, as monks, already knew the tradition; they should know that she could not come in with her head cover especially in such a holy shrine like the one we were about to visit.

But then one of the monks from our group challenged the custodian monk by saying (this story was told to us by the second monk who accompanied the first one): "Suppose you, as a monk, were invited to somebody's house and the host asked you to take off your robe, would you do it?" Given that the robe has very important significance for a Buddhist monk, the custodian

monk apparently wrestled with himself for a while and finally he said: "please invite the nun in."

I do not know if we established a bad precedent there or did damage to tradition. But it was a significant moment that touched us all, and changed the atmosphere of our interaction in our meeting for the subsequent days. It was a clear signal that our Buddhist hosts were going beyond the rituals, and overt traditions to a quest for a deeper human and spiritual connection. And amazingly they were able to do it. When the nun came into the temple, she was profoundly touched that they could set aside such deeply held tradition to welcome her in. I was watching her from time to time. Her demeanor in the temple was not like a Christian tourist in a historical Buddhist temple. There was an air of reverence and worship on her although obviously she was in an environment very alien to her. I could also see the Moslems caught up in the same respect and reverence. The same for the rest of us, Christians. The Hindus relate well with the Buddhists since they have shared traditions.

By putting aside some of the overt barriers, I felt our Buddhist hosts were letting us see the God within them and we could all see it and we could worship it. I felt there was a deep meeting point for all of us in that temple regardless of our backgrounds, religions or origins. It was a sacred moment. That sentiment followed us even after we left the temple and permeated the rest of our time together in the meeting in Kandy. It was an experience whose memory still inspires me.

In a way it was in illustration of the possibility that is out there in our world today. The meeting we had in Kandy, one could say, was a microcosm of the current global situation. 4 major traditions that have significantly shaped the civilizations and cultures of the world were represented in this meeting -- Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam and Christianity. Instead of a clash of civilizations, as our post Sept 11 ideology makes us believe, what was happening was a beautiful meeting point and synergy. It was an illustration of the human potential if we can only use the proper approach and methodology to bring it out.

Here then lies the insight and power that comes from our faith institutions to help us address some of the problems of our troubled global order. I believe that part of the reason why one part of humanity dominates the other, is indifferent and callous to its pain and suffering, or even actively perpetrates it, is because of a lack of deep understanding and internalization of the reality of our "common humanity". It is because of our tendency to falsely divide the world between "us" and "them", "ours" and "theirs". In other words, one part of humanity considers the other as not belonging to it, and therefore does not identify with its problems, suffering, and pain as its own. Thus, it is not motivated to take action to solve the problems or alleviate the suffering, even if it could. If it acts at all, its motivation comes more out of condescending pity than a deep solidarity that emanates from a sense of sharing the problem. Moreover, we shield ourselves with a shortsighted belief that helping the others to alleviate their misery or marginalization would diminish our wealth, power, and prestige.

On the other hand, the awareness of our "common humanity" establishes in our consciousness that we are all inhabitants of the same home, Earth, and are profoundly interconnected with each other as members of one family. We are therefore each other's keepers. Harming others, or being indifferent to their wellbeing will ultimately harm our

own well being as well. Interestingly, this is not just a moralistic and idealistic assertion but something that is validated by experience. When a few enjoy so much and others are in squalor, when the few flaunt their power and domination and others wallow in humiliation and resentment, it will ultimately be very difficult for the wealthy and powerful to enjoy what they have. The miserable, vanquished, and angry hordes will make the status quo unsustainable. Thus the alleviation of the misery in the world or the inclusion of those that are excluded and marginalized is not just naïve altruism but a favour one does to oneself out of pragmatic enlightened self interest if one wants to continue to enjoy one's life and belongings.

When we understand the world from this perspective, it then becomes much easier to mobilize the political will to handle the problems indicated earlier. As I mentioned before, we have currently adequate resources, knowledge and capacity to solve some of these problems that are haunting humanity. What we lack is will. The capacity of our faith institutions and leaders to help us understand and internalize our "common humanity" is one powerful mechanism to mobilize the political will needed to solve these problems. This claim is borne out of the experience of what we call "nation building" in many societies in the world. To a certain extent, it could be argued that "nation building" has been the operationalization of the concept of "common humanity" at the national level. The essence of nation building in a number of societies has been the construction of "we"ness from disparate groups who considered each other as "other". The process has involved attempts to create symbols, culture, politics, economics, social norms and institutions so that diverse groups can begin to identify as one nation, state, or community. The development of democracy, economic justice, power sharing, etc. have been mechanisms to ensure that those who were excluded are included so that they can share in the "we"ness, the common identity. In this situation, the problem of one subgroup becomes the problems of the whole group and thus the whole group is obligated to solve the problems of the subgroup since it is perceived as affecting the whole group. In other words, it is the recognition of "common humanity" (in a national sense) that enables them to identify with each other and take on each other's problems. There are many practical experiences in our recent history where the awareness of "common humanity" has been translated into concrete reality that has profound positive impact on human relationships at least at the national level. Interestingly, we can observe also how the concept of "us" and "them" is so artificial and malleable. There are many instances in recent history where the one time "other"s have become one of "us". Deeply divided and hereditary enemies like the French and Germans, have been able to overcome the wall of that division and forged a strong "us" now. If there can be a practical recognition of "common humanity" at the national or regional level, there is no reason why it cannot happen at the larger species level, at the global level. Just as we talked about "nation building", we must begin to talk about "globe building". I believe that the great world religions have the tool to help us shed the illusory and artificial barriers of "us" and "them" and foster the consciousness that we are in this world together and that we must be galvanized as humanity to address the problems that are posed to destroy us all.

In conclusion, the remedy to the many ills facing our troubled global order might not lie solely in the hands of our politicians, economist, social or natural scientists. It seems more and more that the problems are rooted in confusions deep in the human psyche, self concept, and spirit. Our faith institutions and leaders, as much as the secular ones, have tools and



concepts that can help us decipher the problems and find solutions to them. They must wake up and play their role in order to make a difference before humanity goes far down an irreversible road towards self annihilation. I believe that these institutions can do this better when they collaborate and act collectively than as separate faiths and entities.

## **Promoting Interfaiths to Live Together in Sustainable Justice and Peace<sup>1</sup>**

**by Ma'arif Jamuin**

First of all, I would like to express my gratitude and thankfulness to Tony and his colleague from YMCAs and EED for inviting me to this meeting, “Consultation on Inter-Religious Cooperation in Asia: An Interfaith Endeavour to Learn from Each Other’s Wisdom to Live Together.” I am really happy to be here and be part of such mission. I hope that this Consultation can pave the way for bringing people with different cultures and religions in their lives without dependence on cultural and theological beliefs and can increase people’s knowledge, practice, and love of ethics and deepening their sense of a togetherness towards a better future with just peace.

### **Introduction**

All the people of a society collectively create and maintain culture for much longer than the life of any one person. Culture, anthropologists commonly use, refers to a society or group in which many or all people live and think in the same ways such as their beliefs, rules of behaviour, language, rituals, art, technology, styles of dress, ways of producing and cooking food, political and economic systems, and religion. Many people rely on religion, systems of belief to shape their values and ideals and to influence their behaviour. It distinguishes one human group from others and people have long been aware of cultural differences among societies.

In the stark reality, a group or individual is often treated differently based on something other than individual reason in their life. Such discrimination includes ethnicity, sex, religion, economy, age, or disability. It can be viewed as favourable or unfavourable, depending on whether a person receives favours or opportunities. In this case, discrimination is usually considered unfavourable. However, one of the most pervasive forms of discrimination in this globe is directed toward religious groups.

Throughout the history of human life, religious discriminations have resulted in conflicts, continuing to play an important role in the political life. In India, for example, in the 1991

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<sup>1</sup> Draft paper, presented in the “Consultation On Inter-Religious Cooperation In Asia: An Interfaith Endeavour to Learn from Each Other’s Wisdom to Live Together” on theme of ‘LIVING OUR FAITHS IN COMMUNITY—SEEKING JUSTICE, PEACE AND SUSTAINABLE ALTERNATIVES TOGETHER’. Jointly organised by Asia and Pacific Alliance of YMCAs, Christian Conference of Asia (CCA), and Church Development Service (EED), Germany, in Prapat, North Sumatra, Indonesia, on 5-10 April 2003.

campaign leading up to the parliamentary elections scheduled for May and June, the country was faced with a bitter conflict between the secularist Congress Party, headed by former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, and the Hindu revivalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), led by L. K. Advani. The BJP would like India to be a Hindu state. Politico-religious violence between Hindus and the Moslem minority in India flared anew, and in Tibet, Chinese authorities continued their oppression of Buddhist monks and nuns.

In Tajikistan, Moslem leaders asserted their rights by challenging state authority, sometimes through violent means, and there were clashes among Sunni Moslems, Tajik nationalists, and Communists. Violence between Hindus and Moslems, India's two largest religious communities, occurred throughout 1991. Moslems argued that, as it was impossible to determine where Rama was born the existing mosque should be respected as a religious site in its own right. In Indonesia, sporadic violence between Moslems and Christians also occurred throughout some cities of Java, Ambon, and other parts of the Maluku in the mid- and late 1990s.

Referring to conflicts above, it comes to the conclusion that religion plays a pivotal role in the life of not only in a community but also in a country. We, part of community—living in a multi-cultural, multi-religious and multi-ethnic environment have a more a say in efforts to promote sustainable peace and justice in this global community.

### **Challenges**

In the political practice, some politicians have positioned religious leaders at the vote getters rather than moral movement agent. Thus, the involvement often causes frictions among religions followers. Religion is only used to justify power seeking and policies making.

In the religious teaching, there are some verses in Koran, Bible and other scriptures approving its followers to discriminate those with different religious followers. It also asks believers to state exclusively on revealing and maintaining to what they have faith in. Even, some articles insist believers to follow its teaching without any reason. In Koran, for example, there is a verse saying that; *“There is only Islam as the way to the heaven. There is no right religion in front of the innermost of high, except Islam.”* The followers then use the verse to justify other faiths or other religions wrong. On the other hand, there are many articles teaching the followers to have high tolerance towards other religions and backing efforts to search for justice, peace and togetherness of inter-relation. It goes to prove that religious leaders play a very important role in interpreting the verses be acceptable and practical so as to back the establishment of harmonious life in a religious heterogeneous community.

At the same time, as long as the UN investigation on a suspected biological weapon belongs to Iraq regarding to 1441 resolution, America makes use the situation. George W. Bush pressures many countries all over the world to support his program to combat *Jamaah Islamiyah*, *al-Qaeda* and *Iraqi people*. The western countries would proudly to do the rudeness to the Moslem residency worldwide —over the Moslem states—with armed forces. With reference to the US and Australia and England's activities after the 911-tragedy is to be an appropriate example.

Based on the reason above, even unapproved by UN, America remains attacking Iraq. In the ongoing American invasion backed by British and Australia to Iraq, it lists that the war has already killed more than 5.000 innocent people, mainly children and women. It does not include

psychological and physical impacts such as the unavailability of clean water, housing, infrastructures and the like. This invasion triggers hatred for Moslems around the world as America and its counterparts are anti-Moslem.

Previously, Iraqi people also experienced severe misery during the economic embargo. Moreover, when the US military and its coalitions have taken action, they used uranium tipped bullets and other armour piercing devices against the people of Iraq in the 1991 Desert Storm. This depleted uranium has remained in the country creating severe health problems for the people, especially the children. The international sanctions against Iraq that followed the war have prevented the importation of medicines needed to treat diseases, including those resulting from the depleted uranium. It is estimated that at least 500,000 children have died horrible deaths as a result of these sanctions and the depleted uranium left behind.” (Justpeace newsletter, Vol: 1 No: 2, January 2003).

To reflect on the cases above, it is very difficult to trust on what has happened. The glory of dignity that has power to host any group community suspicious would be lost intensively. It might be a big agenda of any interest group or of powerful (military) state or of person for economic advantage. It is, then, this movement would destroy all beliefs existing in community. So far, no single religion movement can stop it.

### **Religions Response**

The big questions are: “What can religions do in response to the issues? How to bring justice, peace and sustainable life of inter-faith in the midst of hatred among communities?”

As a matter of fact, religions have already taught justice teaching in its day-to-day services but they just ask their own followers rather than to those with different religions. In social interactions, it often becomes the main factor triggering conflicts and turmoil among them, especially in a heterogeneous community or country. It in question also has resulted in the economic, social, and political segregations.

So, religious community plays a leading role in promoting justice to change the terrible worldwide. Conflict and violence are major threats to human being, depriving even the religious practitioner alive of physical and psychological health, faith, an adequate standard of living, education, and often life itself.

It is, then, this long-standing concern for justice that led religious community become involved in addressing the impact of conflict on religion. Promoting justice is a logical outgrowth of this concern. It also requires changing way of thinking along with daily life: at home, at work, and at community/society. It has to colour of any decision.

Furthermore, it is important to understand that promoting justice is not designed to have an immediate impact ongoing conflict. Rather, its role is to change attitude and behaviour, and learning new interpersonal wisdom to live together. It would take for some time, needing a long-term intervention, even generations.

### **Promoting our Faiths Living Together**

In my experience, to advocate people relating to the issues of inter-Faith and inter-Ethnic conflict is like to salt the sea. There was no a single obvious impact that can demonstrate as a result of the implementation of the program. It will make anyone frustrated. The harder you worked, the more frustrated you would be.

In the 14–15 May 1998 tragedy in Solo, Ciscore put its priority on the advocacy movements in that field, such as dialogues on doctrines of truth among religious followers. 30 participants with different religious background attended the weekly dialogues. It lasted six months with different participants and places that aimed at communicating differences of truth doctrines they practice.

In the long process of dialogues relating to the issues, they found out that there is some verses asks to discriminate other religious followers. However, there are also many verses promoting the followers to encourage togetherness among them. The dialogues could give the following results; (1) Understanding about teaching differences to each religion, (2) Realized need for communicating the differences on open forums, (3) Building interfaith networking to improve their community resilience.

Starting from the advocacy experience, I apply it to other cities with actual and potential conflicts. Its model is also depleted in any activities such as active intervention through training of capacity building for grassroots level of religious follower, facilitating workshop on searching dispute resolution, a series of dialogues and consultation to the religious leaders of all religious institutions. Apart from it, I also take part actively in carrying out advocacy toward Moslem-Christian and Dayak-Melayu-Madura community, Internal Displaced Persons in Maluku, Mataram, Pontianak, and Madura in building reconciliation.

Generally, the weaknesses of promoting it are always come from political tension. The result of any advocacy on building resilience of community is to be misplaced if there are activities of political parties on seeking supporters. They will make religious followers divided on because of their affiliation. It is reflected from a field experience on Indonesia case.

In the educational sector, Ciscore in collaboration with the City Government of Surakarta will operate with the so-called *peace education programme* for school-age children. The programme is intended to establish community resilience in the municipality of Surakarta with knowledge, practice, love and sense of consecrating towards their social life and to promote their cultural, societal, and personal competences. They in turn will have equipped themselves with high tolerance and cosmopolitan intellectual capacity to any problems when they grow up so as to give no place for political, ethnic, religious, regional, and political conflicts in the city well-known as the short-fuse city.

Understanding on what Weber expressed in his book entitled “*The Protestant Ethic and The Spirit of Capitalism*” and Robert N. Bellah in “Tokugawa Religion: “*The Values of Pre-Industrial Japan*”, brings me aware that religious values and local wisdoms, actually, can drive people to make use of the vast resources to fix a lack of people confidence. A fragile situation can be changed to be justice and prosperity. For instance, Japanese people could make its condition to be rich and powerful after the World War 2. Japan has used Tokugawa values as an

educational foundation to empower the citizen. The result of the empowerment has positioned the country from a *powerless* to *powerful* country.

That experience above could be used as a spirit of religious community to build their community, especially for Moslem people of Indonesia. Moslem religious leaders should drive their followers to eradicate their weaknesses of togetherness to others. However, to endorse the spirit of togetherness will depends on how to communicate the differences, needs, and interests. As known, each wants to keep their need and interest covered. Unfortunately, nobody could ever meet it.

Since no human society exists in complete isolation, different societies also exchange and share culture. In fact, all societies have some interactions with others, both out of curiosity and because even highly self-sufficient societies sometimes need assistance from their neighbours. Today, for instance, many people around the world use similar kinds of technology, such as papers, telephones, and televisions. Commercial trade and communication technologies, such as computer networks, have created a form of global culture. To this regard, we can campaign the program through the global culture.

### **Closing**

The people movements to eradicate a deep-hatred among others are always done in a wide range of activities, individually and institutionally and both locally and globally. To promote understanding of principles of different religions have also produced a significant impact to the behaviour of religious followers. Beside, the awareness of people to support the campaign of peace and justice has a positive change in years long. Their voices have already overwhelmed of political space over the world.

Therefore, the political elite must stop to make use people in the need to fulfil their interests. It must also be followed by a change of public policies that it can empower people economically and spiritually, both locally and globally. Political leaders have no right to manipulate people to meet their interests in power seeking.

# **Buddhism: Its Exposition and Present Status in Sri Lanka**

*Namo Tassa Bagavato Arahato Samma Sambuddhassa  
Homage to Him, The Exalted the worthy,  
the fully enlightened one*

**by Nandasena Amarasinghe**

To begin, I would like to express my pleasure to be here today, on this auspicious occasion of special session on Inter-religious Cooperation in Asia.

## **What is Buddhism?**

"The non-aggressive, moral and philosophical system expounded by the Buddha, which demands no blind faith from its adherents, expounds no dogmatic creeds, encourages no superstitious rites and ceremonies, but advocates a golden mean that guides a disciple through pure living and pure thinking to the gain of supreme vision and deliverance from all evil, is called the Dhamma and is popularly known as Buddhism." (Narada Buddhism in a nutshell)

The Buddha is not a God, nor a savior who can save others. He explained that deliverance from suffering can only be gained by self-exertion and advised his disciples to be self-reliant.

Striving should be done by yourselves. The Thathagathas (Buddha's) are only teachers. (Dhamniapada, verse 276)

## **Buddhism says:**

Do not accept anything on mere hearsay. Do not accept anything by mere tradition. Do not accept anything on account of rumours. Do not accept anything just because it accords with your scriptures. Do not accept anything by mere supposition. Do not accept any thing by mere inference. Do not accept anything merely because it agrees with your preconceived notions. Do not accept anything because it seems acceptable. Do not accept anything thinking that the ascetic is respected by us. But when you know for yourselves.....these things are immoral, these things are blameworthy, these things are censured by the wise, these things when performed and undertaken, conduce to ruin and sorrow.....then indeed you reject them. When you know for yourselves.....these things are moral, these things are blameless, these things are praised by the wise, these things when performed and undertaken, conduce to well-being and happiness.....then do you live and act accordingly (Kalama Sutra, Sutra Pitaka)

The Buddha said, " He who seeks the Dhamma sees me " (Sutra Pitaka)

As to the aim, the Buddha formulated his teachings in a way that directly addresses the critical problem at the heart of human existence, the problem of suffering and does so without reliance upon myths and mysteries so typical of religion. This thrust of Dharma is clearly illustrated by the main formula into which the Buddha compressed his programme of deliverance, namely the four Noble Truths.

1. The noble truth that life involves suffering
2. The noble truth that suffering arises from craving
3. The noble truth that suffering ends with the removal of craving
4. The noble truth that there is a way to the end of the suffering.

Buddhism not only makes suffering and release from suffering the locus of its teaching, but also deals with the problems of suffering and traces to its roots within our minds first to our craving and clinging, then to ignorance and unawareness of the true nature of things. Since suffering arises from our own minds the cure too must be achieved within our minds.

In trying to achieve the ultimate freedom of serenity Buddhism has clearly shown the path of gaps of beginning and end points. This clear, precise and predictable path is made up of eight factors and known as the Noble eight fold path. It begins with,

1. Right view of the basic truth of existence
2. Right intention for undertake the training
3. Right speech
4. Right action
5. Right livelihood
6. Right effort
7. Right mindfulness
8. Right concentration

The moral code the Buddha prescribed for the laity consists of the five precepts, which require abstinence from killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, false speech and the use of intoxicating substances. The positive side of ethics is represented by the inner qualities of heart corresponding to these rules of restraint, love and compassion for all living beings, honesty in one's dealings with others, faithfulness to one's marital vows, truthful speech and sobriety of mind.

Buddhism also has laid down guidelines for parents and children, husbands and wives, employers and employees, intended to promote a society marked by harmony peace and goodwill at all levels. It also explains to kings their duties towards their citizens. These discourses show Buddhism as an astute social thinking mechanism which understands clearly that government and the economy in any country can flourish only when those in power prefer the welfare of the people to their own private interests.

### **Dissemination of Buddhism or its exposition**

What is remarkable about the dissemination of Buddhism throughout its long history (2550 years) and throughout the world is its ability to win the allegiance of entire populations solely by peaceful means. Buddhism has always spread by precept and example, never by force. The purpose in propagating the Dharma has not been to make converts, but to show others the way to true happiness and peace. Whenever the people of any nation or region adopted Buddhism, it became for them, far more than just a religion, the fountain head of a complete way of life.

Three months after the Buddha's death five hundred of his enlightened disciples held a conference at Rajagaha to collect his teaching and preserve them for posterity. This compilation of texts gave future generations a codified version of the doctrine to rely on for guidance. During the two centuries after the Buddha's death (Parinirvana) his dispensation slowly continued to spread, though its influence remained confined largely to northeast India. In the third century B.C. King Asoka emperor of the Mauryan dynasty turned to Buddhism to ease his pained conscience after a bloody battle. He saw in the Dharma the inspiration for a social policy built on righteousness rather than force and oppression.

Under Asoka's patronage, the monks held a council in the royal capital and decided to dispatch Buddhist missions throughout the Indian subcontinent and also to the outlying regions. As a result the mission to Sri Lanka led King Asoka's son Mahinda who was soon followed by his daughter Sanghamitta who was the most fruitful one and the Theravada form of Buddhism which they introduced prevails in Sri Lanka even to this day. Today the Theravada, the descendant of early Buddhism, prevails in Sri Lanka, Burma, Thailand, Cambodia and Laos.

Beginning in about the first century B.C., a new form of Buddhism gradually emerged which its advocates called the Mahayana, the Great Vehicle, in contrast with the earlier schools, which they called the Hinayana or lesser vehicle. The Mahayanist elaborated upon the career of the Bodhisattva, now held up as the universal Buddhist ideal, and proposed a radical interpretation of wisdom as insight into emptiness or "Shunyata" the ultimate nature of all phenomena.

For the common devotees the Mahayana, texts spoke of celestial Buddhas and Bodhisattvas who could come to the aid of the faithful. In its early phase, during the first six centuries of the Common era, the Mahayana spread to China and from there to Vietnam, Korea and Japan. In these the Dharma established itself to suit the minds of the far Eastern mind rather than the Indian originals. The best known of these is the Zen Buddhism now widely represented in the West.

Later in India Buddhism again evolved into various forms such as Vajrayana or an extension of Tantra and Yogic practices mixed with magic rituals. The "Vajrayana" spread from Northern India to Nepal, Tibet and other Himalayan lands and today dominates Tibetan Buddhism.

Whatever the way Buddhism is practiced in the world or the dissemination of Buddhism throughout the world in the long history is its ability to win the allegiance of entire populations solely by peaceful means and never by force. While various modalities of Buddhist civilization differ widely from Sri Lanka to Japan they are all pervaded by a gentle flavour that make them distinctly Buddhists.

### **Relevance of Buddhism to our own era**



Despite the vast advances man has made in science, technology and have improved living condition in many ways he still finds himself confronted with many global Social problems.

Some of these problems include volatile regional tensions of ethnic and religious character, spread of nuclear weapons, disregard for human rights, the gap between the rich and the poor, child abuse and cruelty to women. International drug trafficking and depletion of natural resources fall into this group.

When we analyze the root of these problems as a whole is their essentially symptomatic character. This clearly shows the characteristics of stubborn insistence on narrow and petty self-interests. The multitude of social ills that afflict us cannot be adequately accounted for without bringing into view, the powerful human drives that lie behind them. Too often, these drives send us in pursuit of divisive, limited ends even when such pursuits are ultimately self-destructive.

The Buddha's teaching offers us two valuable tools to help us extricate ourselves from this tangle. One is its hardheaded analysis of the psychological springs of human suffering. The other is precisely articulated path of moral and mental training it holds out as a solution. Buddhism explains that hidden springs of human suffering, in both the personal and social arenas of our lives, are three mental factors namely greed, hatred and delusion. Buddhist teaching depicts these unwholesome roots as the causes of personal suffering, but by taking a wider view we can see them as equally the source of social, economic and political suffering. Through prevalence of greed human race in the world has been transformed into consumers and commodities in the global market place. Also our vital natural resources are pillaged without concern for future generations. Hatred has led to national and ethnic differences and become the breeding grounds of suspicion and enmity and lead to exploding in violence and revenge. Delusion bolsters the other two roots with false beliefs and political ideologies put forward to justify policies motivated by greed and hatred.

As a Buddhist, what I would say what is above all else is a new mode of perception a universal consciousness that can enable us to regard others as not essentially different from one self. We must learn to detach ourselves from the insistent voice of self-interest to a perspective from which the welfare of all appears as important as one's own good.

In trying to achieve this we must try to embody certain attitudes into our personal lives and social policy. The key ones being loving kindness and compassion (Maithree and Karuna). Through loving kindness we recognize that just as we each wish to live happily and peacefully. Through compassion we realize that just as we are each averse to pain and suffering, so all others are averse to pain amid suffering. Once we have understood this common core of feeling that we share with everyone else, we will treat others with the same kindness and care that we should wish them to treat us. This must apply at a communal level as much as in our personal relations. We must learn to see other communities as essentially similar to our own, entitled to the same benefits as we wish for the group to which we belong.

According to Buddhism, of all things in the world, the one with the most powerful influence for both good and bad is the mind. Genuine peace between people and nations grow out of peace and goodwill in the hearts of human beings. This cannot be won merely by material progress, by economic development and technological innovations, but it demands moral and mental development, It is only by ourselves that we can transform our world in the direction of peace

and amity. The challenge is for us to live together peacefully and to understand and master ourselves

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