

# COMMUNAL HARMONY AND NATIONAL INTEGRATION

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## 1. FOSTERING NATIONAL PERSPECTIVES

**1.1. International outlook strengthens national spirit.** Nationalism is not to be understood as the frog understands the well which it has its being in. It is not an isolated entity in the world. The nation cannot exist like an island. It cannot advance like one of the parallel lines. It has to be necessarily internationally linked. The phenomenon of globalization accelerates this international outlook. The global understanding of India as part of the entire human society is the real foundation for its integrity as a nation. The dictum ‘think internationally and act nationally’ is the light house that shows the direction.

**1.2. Making a more harmonious society has to be the national motto.** The unique diversities of the country are a clarion call to knit together. United the various ethnic, social, cultural and religious realities stand and divided they fall. The horizontal harmony among these entities is the proof that they are in vertical harmony with the Creator of all. The fundamental objective of all the diverse communities has to be making the society more harmonious. Promoting harmony in the diverse aspects of social life situates the relevance of the religious and social traditions and values.

**1.3. Progressing together has to be the national drive.** Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, the most leading poet of America in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, in his poem ‘A Psalm of Life’ exclaims ‘But to act, that each to-morrow finds us farther than to-day’. Human actions are to be oriented to growth and progress. But, to advance alone is no progress at all. Progressing together as a society or the country is progress, in the real sense of the word. A culture of dialogue, interaction, collaboration, good relations and harmony has to accompany the humans for traveling together in life.

**1.4. Making a better society is the basic plan of action.** ‘Leave the place better than you found it’ is the dictum that can motivate human beings to make the society a better place to live in. The society and the country have several social ailments that defeat the accomplishments of education, religion and civilization. They even pull the society generations behind. Only a firm commitment to the plan of action to make one’s personal life, family, neighbourhood, environment, community, country and the human society better can really help in this awkward predicament. Individual and collective action has to go together in the noble mission of making the society better.

## 2. DEVELOPING NATIONAL APPROACHES

**2.1. Joint action with other faith-based communities has to be common minimum religious policy.** Schemes for societal development by individual communities have always been there. There is nothing new about it. It is high time that faith-based communities and their organizations join hands with each other for concerted efforts. That will go a long way in justifying faith itself. All the possible difficulties on the way are certainly worth-attempting. The common minimum objective has to be social uplift and harmony in social life. Therefore, faith-based communities have to get connected and networked with communities and organizations of other perceptions and work together for the advancement of the civilization of the human species.

**2.2. Faith-based communities have to collaborate with the civil society.** The civil society is comprised of lay persons who do not deal with religious matters. They are people who subscribe to non-religious ideologies, as well. They are persons who belong to all walks of life. They belong to diverse sectors and professions. They include scientists, administrators, educationists, industrialists, businessmen, medical doctors, social activists and people of other service sections. They are well-integrated in the society, too. The civil society forms the largest majority of the society. Faith-based communities have to interact with the civil society and joining hands with it for fostering harmony in the society.

**2.3. Promotion of civic sense has to be a collective endeavour.** Civic consciousness is fundamental to being a citizen. Being civilized is the objective of education, too. Doing anything that disturbs the smooth flow of civic life in the society is a violation of the civic duty. Religious communities have special responsibility to set an example in promoting civic sense. Religious and marriage processions on the road and using microphone at night are highly objectionable. Blocking the roads when VIPs travel and dirtying public places are also grave violations of the civic duty. Religious sense and education coupled with humane ways have to contribute to the civic uplift of the citizens.

**2.4. Citizens have to participate in the administrative process.** The governmental machinery is a necessity in societal life. Maintaining law and order, facilitating the smooth flow of life, equitable distribution of resources and opportunities, measuring out justice to all and guiding the destinies of the development and progress of the country are some of its functions. But, concentration of power and resources can make the system self-centred. Administering in terms of the benefits of the elected functionaries is the consequence. Negotiating with the governmental and administrative machinery is the right as well as the duty of the citizens. Their irresponsible ways have to be challenged. Faith-based organizations, social activists, experts, scholars, etc have to participate in the administrative process.

### **3. MEASURES FOR NATIONAL INTEGRATION**

**3.1. One has to become the change one wants to see.** In fact, no one can change the other. Change starts with oneself. One should have a will to do things. Shifting the responsibility to the other does not help. The sin of omission of the good people is more detrimental than the sin of commission of a few people. One has to decide to become a good human being oneself. The rest of the humanity is likely to follow the suit. Such a process of change is oriented to social transformation.

**3.2. One has to equip oneself with regular home work.** Wide reading, reflection, prayer, experience and interaction form a solid foundation for a major take off. One has to strengthen the roots of one's religious, ideological, moral and cultural ethos. One has to be in constant interaction and communion with other religious and social traditions. Thinking globally and acting locally is an axiom for being effective. Broadening the horizons is the dynamic process of equipping oneself.

**3.3. One has to engage in personal friendship with persons of all affiliations.** Having friends in one's own kith and kin is nothing more than usual. Crossing the boundaries to persons of other languages, ideologies, ethnic characteristics, faith traditions, food tastes, dress habits, nationalities and cultures and establishing intimate friendship with them is highly enriching as well as meritorious. The circle has to be further broadened to persons of non-religious and civic backgrounds. Personal friendships require an attitude of recognizing, appreciating and promoting the good in the other. A spirit of loving and serving the other leads to a 'we-feeling', which is the foundation for national integration.

**3.4. One has to broaden one's home towards a neighbourhood community.** The urban culture today is highly obsessed with an understanding of self-contained life. Considering one's limits to one's own house reflects very little humane sense. One has to grow towards considering one's given neighbourhood as one's extended home, family or community. Taking interest in one another, helping one another and maintaining friendly relations with all the members of the neighbourhood will contribute immensely to peaceful co-existence and harmonious living in the country.

**3.5. Organizing inter-community family get-together is helpful to knitting together.** Enlarging the human relations has a variety of ways. Since family is the most basic unit of the society, fostering inter-family relations among people of all backgrounds is a significant measure for ushering in national integrity. Gatherings in which equal number of families from different communities participate and interact with each other can be greatly useful. It has to be made sure that the entire family with parents and children, husbands and wives, brothers and sisters come together. Inter-family friendship coupled with collaboration across the boundaries is a strong basis for the integrity of the nation and the society.

**3.6. Religious, social and national festivals have to be celebrated involving all communities.** Festivity gives golden opportunities for coming together. Joy is to be shared. The wider the circle of sharing, the more is the quality of joy. Festivals are occasions of widening the circle of celebration. Celebrating the social events, religious festivals and the national days of importance with people of different communities is a living symbol of staying united. Such gestures serve as grass root measures for social integration and national unity.

**3.8. Involvement of women and youth in the process has to be specially ensured.** Women form 50% of the human society. Approximately 40% of the population of the country is comprised of the younger generation, too. But, the participation of these two sections of the country in processes of legislation, execution and judiciary is very much insignificant. The above situation of the country smacks of a major imbalance. Affirmative action is required on emergency basis for involving women and youth in decision-making, administration and social dealings. Such an inclusive approach is fundamental to national integrity.

**3.9. Welfare schemes for the weaker sections have to be undertaken by communities on a joint basis.** Humanitarian action can be motivated by both religious and non-religious ideologies. There are countless organizations in all communities that pioneer various schemes for the wellbeing for the society. But, it is high time today to launch joint schemes by individuals and organizations from different communities for the weaker sections of the society. Such a gesture highlights the fruit of religious sense and education at the same time. Poor students scholarship scheme, housing scheme for the poor, employment scheme for the literate youth, advocacy for the rights of the other community, etc are ways that reflect a spirit of social responsibility on a higher plane.

**3.10. 'Harmony forums' are to be launched as a regular task force.** Translating the theory into action is the success of the theory. Good ideas that do not produce fruits are like aborted babies. Task forces are required in order to initiate a plan of action for the good of the nation. Harmony Forums are to be constituted with well-meaning and committed persons from all affiliations. They need to be erected on diverse levels. A plan of action has to be chalked out. The forums have to facilitate resolution of conflicts between individuals and communities. They have to sensitize the general public for peaceful co-existence. They have to negotiate with the misguided forces. They have to interact with fundamentalists and fanatics. They have to participate with the governmental and administrative system for good governance. Harmony Forums are sustainable units for fostering communal amity and national integration.

## II. SECULAR PERSPECTIVE FOR HARMONIOUS LIVING

### 1. THE UNDERSTANDING OF THE 'SECULAR'

**1.1. 'Secular' is not negative in meaning.** Often the word is used in terms of the 'temporal'. It is understood as pertaining to worldly things. It is also thought of having to do with things that are not regarded as religious, spiritual or sacred. But, 'secular' does not mean 'irreligious' or 'worldly'.

**1.2. The word 'secular' is positive in meaning.** 'Secularism' is a principle that upholds the supreme position of the state and the equality of all entities including faith. It rules out discrimination of persons or communities on any ground. It argues out the mixing up of politics and religion.

**1.3. 'Secular' is also a broadened understanding of the 'sacred'.** It does not contradict the 'sacred' or the 'heavenly'. It does not accept the narrow, centralized and geographically located understanding of the 'sacred'. It highlights a de-centralized, limitless and universal outlook of the 'sacred'.

**1.4. 'Secular' is a holistic attitude to life.** It is non-attachment to one. It has an all-inclusive approach to the dimensions and units of life. It espouses the attitude of the great mystic poet Kabir 'jit dekhon tit toon' (wherever I look I see you (the supreme) reflected). It sees the entire creation, all human beings, all places, all books, all jobs, etc at a single glance.

### 2. 'SECULAR PERSPECTIVE' OF THE INDIAN CONSTITUTION

**2.1. 'Secular Perspective' is the spirit of the Constitution.** It is the genius of the Constitution. The preamble of the Constitution elaborates the national values inherent in the secular spirit. Secular perspective is the treasure of the nation. It is the basic identity of the Indian citizens, as well.

**2.2. 'Secularism recognizes the plurality of the country.** India is privileged to have diverse ethnic traits, languages, ideologies, faiths, social traditions and cultures. It is the sacred duty of the state to safeguard and promote all of them with a national policy.

**2.3. Democracy is the national policy that befits the social texture of the country.** The principle of democracy sustains the national spirit. Every person or community has a voice. Rights and duties are to be honoured by all. Principles, policies and laws are for all.

**2.4. All are equal before law.** All individuals and communities have their due place as citizens. All are worthy of respect. No one has a privileged place before the law. The state shall not be under the grip of the stronger in number, wealth or power. All have to abide by the stipulations of the law.

**2.5. Majority and minority attitudes violate the 'secular' spirit of the nation.** No one group shall claim any preferential position over the other on any ground. Big or small, all individuals and communities are entitled to obtain opportunities for developing their potentialities and for living a dignified life as citizens. The so called stronger has to taken care of the weaker.

**2.6. Secularism is a value system that suits modern societies.** Diversity is the mark of modern societies that are cosmopolitan. The new wave of globalization has fostered this phenomenon. Only secular values can combat fundamentalist and communal drives as well as the anti-social practices. Secularism promotes affirmative action for redressing socio-economic inequalities. It is committed to a civilization that suits the times of the humans.

### **3. ASSESSING RELIGION FROM A SECULAR ANGLE**

**3.1. Is not religion an over-sensitive issue?** As a matter of fact, religion, to a great extent, has become a 'highly inflammable' matter, like petrol and diesel. Often people get offended and react, like the bush 'touch-me-not'. People seem to get attached and addicted to religious matters. Should there be so much passion in the name of religion?

**3.2. Do not uncritical ways of religion betray religion itself?** Much of the religious world is under the grip of superstition and blind faith. It seems to be the 'opium of the people', as Karl Marx says. People tend to become perpetual victims of mere rituals. The masses are increasingly under the clutches of emerging 'mini-gods' and their personality cult. Flowing along the current unreflectively makes their fate 'bhedchaal' and 'bheedchaal'. Is not religion more enslaving than liberating?

**3.3. Does not religion divide more and unite less?** The unity fostered by religion is in a limited context only. It is selective unity. There are various political, economic, ethnic and social drives that are active behind religion. Often, money and power seem to guide the destiny of religion. Competition and rivalry aggravates divisiveness.

**3.4. Religion carries, ironically enough, a negative history.** Most of the instances of violence, wars and deaths in the world were caused by religion. Much of the mutual distancing, tension and division in life occurs in the name of religion, too. Religion is not all pure. It contains conflicting tendencies of peace and war, love and hate, unity and disunity, self-seeking and selflessness as well as liberating and enslaving.

**3.5. Does not religion promote pathological cases?** Stagnant understandings of religion encourage attitudes of exclusiveness, absoluteness, relativism and conservativeness. They produce fundamentalists, fanatics, communalists, extremists, separatists and terrorists. Such religionists are indeed dead, though not buried. They are lost in the past and are not fortunate to live in the present, much less reach the threshold of the future.

**3.6. Is not the inner harmony of religion disturbed?** Religion seems to be too much head-centred and rationalized. Empty abstractions and merely theoretical stipulations do not correspond to grass root realities. Too much organization and institutionalization 'kill the spirit', too. On the other side, there is lot of emotional, sentimental and unorganized ways. The growth of the religion appears to be one-sided and un-coordinated. The head and the heart as well as the formal and the natural ways do not seem to be harmonized enough in religion.

**3.7. Is not the religious identity a multi-dimensional reality?** A large portion of the religionists seem to have misunderstood their religious identity. The partial understanding of identity poses problems of crisis, complex, assertions and clash in the name of one's religious identity. The identity-consciousness has to be broadened towards an all-sided grasp of the religious phenomenon as having to do with ethnic traits, ideology, social customs, values, food tastes and dress habits, culture and spiritual world view, other than faith.

## 4. SECULAR MINDSET FOR HARMONIOUS LIVING

**4.1. One has to broaden the vision of life.** The definition of life can be religious or non-religious and theistic and non-theistic. Non-attachment to one and creative relation to all re-defines human life with a superior meaning. Secular mindset is a large-hearted perception of life. A set of inner eyes that can see the entire reality at a glance is called for.

**4.2. Harmonious living is the ultimate value of human life.** Human life is transient. Yesterday we were not there, today we are there and tomorrow we may not be there. Being part of this ideology, faith or community or the other is immaterial. The digested result of peaceful and happy co-existence with one and all is the refined outcome of life.

**4.3. Constitution has to be accepted as the sacred scripture of the country.** The citizens of the country have to grow towards a stature that facilitates holding the Constitution of the country with even more respect than that is paid to their religious scripture or the classic book of values and ideals. The Constitution highlights the entirety of the human and spiritual values the Indian society is invited to live by. Could the citizens afford compromising such a secular outlook that is their most basic duty?

**4.4. Indian culture is a 'composite culture'.** 'Unity in diversity' coupled with 'vasudhaivkutumbakam' is the hallmark of the country. A colloquium of religious, social, cultural, ideological, ethnic, professional and linguistic streams is the real culture of the country. The citizens need to learn to live a shared life, beyond discrimination on any grounds. 'Complementariness' and 'we-feeling' are the fundamental lessons of human life, especially in India.

**4.5. The right spirit of religion has to be imbibed for a spiritual reach out.** Religion is meant to add meaning and quality to human life. That is why Jesus says 'Sabbath is for the human being'. It cannot be vice versa. The religious phenomenon has to be assessed according to this criterion and its real spirit has to be imbibed. Those who hold non-religious values and ideals have to be result-oriented, as well. Reaching out to the fellow human beings and to the supreme power above is the spirituality that 'secular perspective' is all about.

## III. STRATEGIES FOR COMMUNAL HARMONY

### 1. AWAKENING THE REAL SPIRIT OF RELIGION

**1.1. The focus of religion has to be on its foundational connotation.** The word 'religare' means 'to bind/connect again'. 'Getting related' to the supreme power and to other human beings summarizes the essentials of religion. Religion is a relationship with the divine power and with one's fellow human beings and the world around.

**1.2. Dharma unearths a complete meaning of life.** 'Dharma' or 'dhaaran karna' means 'to receive', 'to own' and 'to feel responsible for'. It stands for one's 'duty', 'conscience' and 'nature'. To 'feel bound' by one's conscience' and to 'feel responsible' for one's life and that of others is the sum and substance of dharma. It is 'right way of living' or 'right conduct', as well.

**1.3. One has to ascend the rungs of the ladder of religion.** Religion is a complex system of ideas, stories, symbols, beliefs, practices and experiences. An elaborate structure of symbols and rituals is the lowest level. Stories, myths and legends are come at the next. Doctrines, dogmas and administration

follow the suit. Spiritual experiences advance the journey. Good behaviour culminates the religious journey as the fine result.

**1.4. The dimensions of the foundation of faith have to be accepted.** There are diverse perceptions of the supreme power or the creator. There are theistic and non-theistic angles to perceive the beyond. Theism can be monotheistic, tri-theistic, polytheistic, pantheistic, etc. too. The ultimate reality is beyond denominational, religious and ideological affiliations. Spiritual excellence in life is the foreseeable target.

**1.5. Religion is the motivating factor in life.** ‘If one really wants to do anything in life, one should have a religion’, as Bernard Shaw says. Subscribing to a complex system of beliefs and practices or performing a set of rituals is not what is intended. That which motivates one towards higher accomplishments is religion. Religion is the source of strength, as well. Religion gives a sense of direction to one’s life.

**1.6. Commonalities in religions are to be explored.** Every human being has a common origin, existence and destiny, irrespective of individual affiliations. The way one thinks, speaks and behaves is religion proper. The sum and substance of one’s experiences, attitudes and approaches is the core religion of everyone. One’s spiritual experience is the foundation of one’s vision and mission in life. Much of religion is common from this point of view.

**1.7. Life is the centre and not religion.** ‘Sabbath is for the human being’ (Mk 2.27), as Jesus says. Religion is at the service of the human being. This religion or that religion matters less. Living or dying for one’s religion or faith sounds a fundamental disorientation. Religion-centred approach to life has to be substituted by life-centred approach to religion.

**1.8. Religion is the source of harmony.** ‘Religion has to be what God intended it to be, a source of goodness, harmony and peace’, says Pope John Paul II. Accordingly, whatever that promotes goodness, harmony and peace is religion and whatever that blocks or does not accelerate them is not religion. Jesus culminates this fact saying ‘blessed are the peace-makers, for they shall be called the children of God’ (Mt 5.6). Religion has to be the abode of divine qualities and create divine families.

**1.9. Religion is a qualitative vision and not quantitative.** ‘Saar saar ko gahi rehein, thothaa dey udaai’, says the great mystic poet Kabeer. Focus on the essentials of faith and the courage to go beyond the non-essentials is the criterion of discernment. A critical approach that constantly revises the baggage of faith is the basic quality of a pilgrim of faith. Every theist needs to have an atheist in him or her. Dialogue between religious and non-religious perspectives will be helpful, too.

**1.10. One’s self-understanding has to be dialogical.** Human life has individual and social dimensions. Both together formulate the human identity, as singular and plural together compose the grammar in language. There are exclusive and inclusive aspects in it. Being rooted in one is the individual aspect and being related to the other is the social aspect. All items have multiple identities. The shared identities of blood, faith and humanity have the scope of evolving into a spiritual identity that is beyond all identities.

**1.11. Journeying towards ever-broader horizons is the dynamics of religion.** The spiritual poet Ravindra Naath Tagore, in his world classic ‘Geetanjali’, aspires to see the divine every moment in a new form (‘Nitya naye naye roopon mein’). Religious thinker Kenneth Leech puts forward the underlying logic of the same when he says ‘God is always beyond’. Innovative ways, new insights,

new interpretations and new approaches are the genius of religion. Constantly breaking new grounds is the real spirit of religion.

## **2. RESPONDING TO COMMUNAL ATROCITIES POSITIVELY**

**2.1. The larger implications of the communal atrocities are to be understood.** Communal violence is a violation of the courtesy line between two communities. It is the defiance of the Constitution of the country that guarantees security of all communities. It is a blatant proof of the failure of the governmental machinery in protecting the wellbeing of the communities. It is the desecration of the glorious spiritual and cultural heritage of the country. It is the break up of the secular fabric and democratic ethos of the country. It is an infringement of the fundamental rights of human beings as per UN Declaration. It would mean also committing crimes against humanity.

**2.2. Lessons need to be learnt from the atrocities of the past.** Communal atrocities were massively committed against the Christian community in 2007 and 2008, against the Muslim community in 2002 and against the Sikh community in 1984. Challenges are golden opportunities for responsible introspection and decisive action. Inadequacy of the methodology and style of the life of the community needs to be evaluated. Lessons need to be learnt from the failures of the past and appropriate measures are to be taken in order to repair the past.

**2.3. The wounds of the past have to be healed.** Often the memories of the atrocities are more painful than the atrocities themselves. Wounds might have been inflicted more in the memories than on the bodies and on the properties. Healing the memories of the wounded history is inevitable for a fresh start. 'Forgive and forget', though difficult, is the spiritual gesture that facilitates normalcy for the days and years ahead. The prayer of Jesus 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they are doing' is the only source of motivation and strength. To be free of any feeling of vengeance and retaliation against the misguided perpetrators is the beginning of the right way forward.

**2.4. One's own community has to re-organized and empowered.** In cases of communal atrocities there could be reasons on either side. It is possible that the offending side is stronger, selfish, arrogant and aggressive. The victim side could be in a condition of being unorganized, disunited and weak, as well. The mishap could be a mirror and an eye-opener to see the state one is in and to re-organize the community for the better. The leadership of the community has to be sharpened. It has to be ensured that all the sectors of the community have participation in the making of the community. Strategies for mutual support and the welfare of all have to be evolved. The dynamics of the community have to be strengthened.

**2.5. Negotiating with the offending organizations or community is the reparatory gesture.** Interaction between the offender and the victim is not easy at all. But it is not between individuals. The rest of the community or concerned communities have to come forward. Assistance of professional strategists and facilitators has to be obtained. This act has to be performed at different levels and along with social activists, advocates, religious leaders, scholars, administrators and the like. Logistics have to be carefully chalked out. Such a gesture will certainly bring lasting results.

**2.6. Learning to live in harmony with the majority community is a major step.** 'Minority complex' is self-defeating. Treating the other as majority also does not help. The smaller community has to ensure that it falls in line with the main-stream traditions of the country. The larger cultural values of the country are the shared cultural heritage as well as the common roots of the all citizens of the country. They need to be owned by all. Any sort of polarized and separatist thinking cannot be justified by even the values of one's own religious traditions.



**2.7. Living in harmony with all other communities is a complete measure.** The communal tension is a challenging opportunity to take a deviation in the understanding of one's own religion and that of others. Religious and other diversities are the collective gift of the same Creator. They are the common cultural heritage of the human society. Differences are enriching. They are complementary to each other and not contradictory. While upholding the specific values of one's own religious tradition, the particular values of other traditions and communities are to be honoured. Good relations with people of all communities are to be scrupulously maintained.

**2.8. Collaborating with all communities is the road to communal harmony.** To join hands with others one has to ensure being on the same platform. A 'spirit of togetherness' with all is the starting point. The universal values inherent in all communities are to be jointly promoted. Working together fosters unity. Joint humanitarian action as well as inter-community support will accelerate harmony with others. 'Harmony Forums' comprised of well-meaning and committed persons could be launched for checking inter-community violations and for making the society more amicable. Mutual good will and collaboration is the highway to fostering communal harmony in the country.

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