

FESTIVALS OF RELIGIONS

Dr M.D. Thomas

Festival is a special occasion of feasting or celebrating. It is an opportunity for re-living a sense of belonging together as a group. It highlights a certain specific aspect of a particular community. Festival is a social event. It is an occasion for family, friends, neighbours and others to come together. It increases the spirit of togetherness and relationship with all those involved. It is a ceremonial way of passing on to the upcoming generation the genius of one's social traditions. Festive mood is the spirit of the festival. When people really involve in the concept of the festival and invent diverse novel ways of expressing the inner joy with others, festivity really emerges.

Festivals have an all-inclusive parameter. They have to be understood in a broad sense. Some of them are festivals and some of them are commemorations. Martyrdoms or deaths and anniversaries of the birth of the Gurus or great men or founders of religious traditions are considered festivals. Festivals include anniversaries of memorable previous occurrences or significant occasions or special events in the history of a family, community, nation or a given portion of the society. Festivals have intellectual, emotional and spiritual implications. It touches upon various sociological dimensions, as well.

Festivals of Religions are religious festivals that emerged in the diverse religious traditions. The present forms of festivals in the religious traditions, obviously, have a long history of evolution. Religious festivals are not merely religious. They are deeply rooted in the cultural, social, economic, psychological, ethnic, communitarian, national and other situations. Religious festivals are sacred times that provide a special feel of meeting God. To be touched and inspired by God is what is special about religious festivals. Re-living the past events and memories through rituals and social celebrations makes divine presence active in life. Religious festivals are worth being celebrated only when such an experience is shared with a wide spectrum of people, highlighting their socio-cultural fruits.

Festivals of Religions are opportunities to reach out to the other. Religious festivals have their roots in their particular communities. They derive a special identity that corresponds to the respective tradition. All the same, they are not the private property of particular communities. To consider them as 'yours and mine' would be defeating the larger purpose of celebrating those festivals. 'All the religious festivals are the collective cultural and social heritage of the human society; they are ours'. They are

God-given opportunities to celebrate our human existence both in its broader and deeper dimensions. They are golden occasions of reaching out to the other – to the other in communities other than that of one’s own as well as to the other in one’s own family and community.

Festivals of Religions have to contribute to making the society more harmonious.

The basic spirit of festivity is other-orientedness. The natural way of celebrating religious festivals is involving others. Religion is intended to unite others. Festivals are special occasions of joyous coming together. Setting limits to the extent of the celebration in a shortvisioned manner spoils the real fun of the festival. One should not be attached to the so-called ‘one’s own’ while deciding upon the horizons of the celebration. The inter religious, non-religious and social implications have to be governing the criterion of festivity. Celebrating with the less fortunate and the deprived sisters and brothers of the society as well as with strangers and people of other communities determine the *raison d’être* of the religious festival. It has to be ensured that the celebration of the religious festivals, may they be of any religion, contribute to promoting peace and amity in social life. They have to be oriented to making the society more humane, harmonious and qualitatively better. This number of ‘Fellowship’ on the ‘Festivals of Religions’ cherishes such an aspiration. Would You not extend Your hands to hold together for achieving this sublime aspiration of the human heart?

Dr M.D. Thomas

Founder Director, Institute of Harmony and Peace Studies

Floor 1, A 128, Sector 19, Dwarka, New Delhi 110075

Tel.: 09810535378 (p), 08847925378 (p), 011-45575378 (o)

Email: mdthomas53@gmail.com (p), ihps2014@gmail.com (o)

Website: www.mdthomas.in (p), www.ihpsindia.org (o)

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/mdthomas53>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/mdthomas53>

Academia.edu: <https://independent.academia.edu/MDTHOMAS>