

RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES TO JOIN HANDS FOR A MORE HARMONIOUS SOCIETY

Dr M.D. Thomas

Introduction

We are privileged human beings to have our existence in a developed society like that of today. Human civilization, as we know, has made significant advancements in all the spheres of life. Innumerable things are improvised for promoting the appetite for living, for making life convenient and for decorating human life in diverse dimensions. Thanks to the modern tendencies like globalization, the world human society has become much more a smaller unit. Transportation facilities have reduced the geographical distances. Communication technology has promoted unlimited information among the peoples as regards the world realities. The diverse sectors of the society have come closer to each other. Nations are all the more looking for collaborative inroads for peaceful co-existence and integral development. Remaining aloof from other individuals, communities and countries today has become next to impossible. This seems to be the central characteristic of the modern civilization.

In such a complex as well as fascinating phenomenon of the world human society, how could religious communities afford to exist like islands that are cut off from each other? Can they dare to travel alone as parallel lines? If not, what should be the position of the religious communities in relation to each other? What should be the attitude of religious leaders towards other religious communities? Is it not high time they realize that they have a common origin, a common existence and a common destiny? Are they not aware of the great percentage of similar experiences they share? Should they not consistently search for common grounds to gather and then travel together the path of a joint pilgrimage to the same Creator and source of all life? Should they not get into creative and lasting friendships with people of other religious affiliations? When are the religious stalwarts going to identify the common enemy of irreligion hiding but active in the respective religious campuses? What are the common problems that the religious, social and political leaders of the society are surrounded by? What are the responsible sociological roles the religious leaders are invited to jointly play in the society, for the making of a better tomorrow? These are some of the staring questions that squarely challenge us today, as we have come together, in response to the highly laudable initiative of the motivated religious citizens of Dibrugarh, who are inviting us towards a world of superior values of human life.

Harmony Perspective of life

Coming together in a spirit of good will towards one and all is the sign of being truly religious as well as human. Sharing the rich dimensions of our diversities with one another is nothing less than a real celebration of life. Celebrating life cannot be at any rate by the mercy of anyone. One has to qualify oneself for it. The eligibility for enjoying the heavenly peace and bliss amidst the earthly dwelling is a 'harmony perspective of life'. Harmony vision would mean broadening the horizons of the various dimensions of our life. It is breaking the barriers and building bridges between the individuals and communities. It would mean having a feel of the entire life and creation at a glance. It would mean going beyond the self-centred boundaries one has erected out of insecurity. It makes us spiritual, by way of rising above the petty limits of one's own religious world. Harmony perspective of life would mean being humane to all beings, without any discrimination. It invites us to appropriate a dialogical attitude to all that we consider 'the other'. It is living a non-aggressive and non-dominating style of life. It is a relational approach to life. It would mean being a sister, a brother, a friend and a companion to the other. It is walking together with the other in the journey of life. It is getting enriched by the other and enriching the other, at the same time. Harmony perspective of life is the foundation for living a more refined and complete human life.

The colloquium of world religions and cultures

Faith invites the human society to believe that there is a Creative Power above, who is responsible for the entire creation. All the languages, ethnic origins, ideologies, professions, social customs, religious traditions, and cultures have their roots in that Power. Founders and Scriptures of all religions, all great men and classics of the world and all the social and cultural streams of the society are the gift of the same Creator to the world. They are not the private property of any one individual or community. They are the common heritage of the human society. The world needs all of them. That is why they are there. No one has the license to control or eliminate any of them. All of them deserve due respect and a humble disposition of a disciple. It is not that one is mine and the others are of others. 'One is mine in special and the others are mine in general'. Such a relational network of life resources is the art of meaningful living. One has to appropriate an attitude of respecting the other, accepting the other, learning from the other, loving the other, serving the other and promoting the other. We exist together as a single unit. We belong to each other in mutual relation. We belong to the Creator together.

Shared Identity

Identity is basic to an earthly existence, especially for human beings. Every individual and community has an identity of its own. This is essential for being recognized as unique beings. Identity gives one a sense of belonging. This cannot be parted with, even for a while. But this identity has two dimensions. We are individual beings. We are social beings, as well. We are individual persons and individual communities of diverse characteristics. But we are citizens of the same country and members of the world human society. Individual identities emerging from ethnic, linguistic, religious, ideological, social and cultural belongings have to grow to an awareness of a common identity of being human beings. Singular characteristics of the individual identity are to be maintained and developed. But common features of the shared identity are to be explored, too. Differences and commonalities are as if two sides of the same coin. Consciousness of our common identity will facilitate a 'we-feeling', which is the proof of being educated and grown up in life as a human being.

Secular Perspective of Life

The genius of the Constitution of India is the 'Secular perspective of Life'. It summarizes the entirety of the human and spiritual values the Indian society is invited to live by. Secular is not worldly. Secular is non-attachment to one path. India has no one religion, no one language, no one culture, no one ideology, as its own. A composite culture is the fundamental identity of our country. A colloquium of the religious, social, cultural, ideological, ethnic, professional and linguistic streams is the esteemed treasure of our nation. All the individuals and communities have their due place as the privileged citizens of this country. All of them are worthy of respect; all of them deserve opportunities for developing one's personality and for living a dignified life. There is no small or great, in the real sense of the word. If there is any one who claims to be stronger in number, wealth or power, it is his or her duty to see that the so called smaller and weaker are respectfully taken care of. There lies the pivotal spirit of secularism as well as of religion.

Besides, Secular Perspective of Life is a broadened understanding of the sacred. It decentralizes the sophisticated understanding of the geographically located presence of the Divine in the world, in the form of temples, churches, masjids, gurudwaras, and the like. It facilitates the seeker to see and experience the Divine everywhere. That is why the great mystic Kabir exclaims: 'jit dekhoon, tit toon' (wherever I look, You are there). All the places, all the jobs and all the expressions are the true dwelling places of the Divine. The whole creation, all the living beings and especially human beings are the living and real temples of the Divine. This is what secular perspective argues for.

Secular perspective of life supports and nourishes the harmony vision, which is foundational to life.

Fundamentalism, fanaticism and communalism violate this sacred spirit of secularism. No sensible person can afford to violate the constitutional duty of the citizen of this country. One who, for any reason, slips away from this primary requirement, may he or she belong to any group or school of thought, he or she is a fundamentalist or a fanatic or a communal person. A fundamentalist is attached to the past and lives in it. A fanatic acts on that past unreflectively and aggressively, out of all proportions. A communal person is stuck up with in the boundaries of his own small world, like a frog in the well. Fundamentalists, fanatics and communalists have no religion. They are a category by themselves. They can be found in any sect. They are capable of burning the sacred scripture of another community, of destroying the statue of the founder of another religious tradition, of raping the woman of the other's family and of murdering the members of other faith groups. Fundamentalists, fanatics and communalists are the real threats to the basic religion that subsists in the diverse worldviews and traditions. They are literally pathological cases and they need to be treated the way they duly deserve. They seem to take the society for a ride and the vast majority of the good citizens and spiritual-minded people seem to be indifferent or in a deep slumber. If all those who claim to be religious and educated do not get awakened in time and bell the cat, I honestly feel that these 'HIV' viruses will drastically be detrimental not only to the respective religion but also to a meaningful human existence on the globe. This is the challenge the secular perspective is posing before all the well-meaning citizens and religious leaders of the world, especially in India, today.

Plan of Action for a More Harmonious Society

Harmony Vision has to be translated into a Harmony Mission. The problems of human life need to be addressed. Social maladies like discrimination in the name of gender, race, caste, class, creed, language, profession, ideology, social mores, and the like, should be effectively treated. Serious measures are to be chalked up for making the society more harmonious as well as riot-free. One should keep growing towards the deeper implications of one's own religious tradition. One should also get familiar with the religious values of the other. One's own religious faith has to broaden up towards a circle of all faiths. To be religious is to be inter-religious and to cultural is to be inter-cultural. Therefore, joint schemes are to be evolved among different religious communities and plans are to be implemented for making a better society.

Leaders and followers of one religious tradition have to get into personal friendship with persons of other religious persuasions. Intimate friendships across the boundaries are the surest ways of encountering the Divine in the heart of the other. Human beings

are the living temples of the Divine. The religious co-pilgrims have to get mutually enriched with regard to attaining human qualities, through exercising spiritual values. All religious centres should reach out to their neighbourhood. They should take care of the people of the given area in a spirit of brotherhood and celebrate a spirit of being a family or community with them. This noble gesture will prove the relevance and quality of the religious presence.

The religious leaders should consider the city, town or village of their belonging their home and jointly attempt to network the individuals, organizations and communities there. Leaders and well-meaning people of all religious affiliations and social belongings should constitute themselves into a 'Harmony Forum', in order to work as a task force for pioneering the harmony perspective of life. They should jointly attend to communally disturbed situations and maintain the society in a spirit of harmony. Such a Harmony Forum should keep in touch with all the diverse elements of the place of their area of access and operation and play a facilitating role in the respective society for development as well as for conflict resolution.

Conclusion

There is a world-famous dictum called 'leave the place better than you found it'. Every human being finds the world in a particular state while he or she is born into it. He or she should leave the world in a better state when he or she goes beyond the world. Only then, being born into the world becomes worth the while. Making a better society is the fundamental duty of every human being. Nourishing the human beings with strength and courage to live one's life as well as supplying the foundational vision and motivation required for the same is the fundamental role of religion. All the religious backgrounds, in some way or other, geared towards this sublime objective. It is high time that the diverse religious traditions rise above their own private considerations that divide the society into pieces and pool their singular characteristics together for addressing the social problems of the society. Leaders of all religious persuasions and well-meaning people of all social affiliations should get tuned to a new mindset and join hands with each other in order to make a more harmonious society.

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>