

WHO IS MY NEIGHBOUR? MULTI-FAITH IMPLICATIONS

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INTRODUCTION

‘Cosmopolitan character of life’ is the privilege and identity the humans of the present day culture are bestowed with. Human life in most of the cities of the world, of India in particular, is increasingly becoming one of a mixed community. This situation of plurality has massively affected the towns of the country, as well. It appears as if this phenomenon wouldn’t leave even villages untouched, in the foreseeable future. People of diverse persuasions of race, ethnicity, language, profession, ideology, faith, nationality, culture, etc co-exist, or are forced to co-exist, in the same geographical area. But, have the humans, especially the citizens of India, learned to recognize in the ‘other’ their ‘neighbour’, irrespective of their particular affiliations? It takes courage to answer such a challenging question! This short write-up attempts to consider the dimensions and implications of this vital question.

1. CONCEPTUAL NUANCES

1.1. The Visibility of the Creator in the Created

The Creator of this mysterious universe remains invisible from the bare eyes. The intelligent power behind the entire dynamics of life remains invariably hidden within life. The God of faith abides in the heart of everything. Art is in concealing art. The true artist has to stay behind the curtain without assuming any importance. The work of art has to speak for itself and while doing so, it speaks volumes of the artist. This is the wisdom of the Creator or the artist. He is unquestionably visible in his created beings and objects.

1.2. The Multi-Perceptual Character of the Creator

Is the Creator ‘he or she’? We just do not know. Different religious and cultural settings evolved different perceptions. Some see the Creator as ‘he’, some as ‘she’, some as ‘a composite form of he and she’ and some as ‘neither he nor she’. Who is right and who is wrong, it is difficult to say. Perhaps all are right their own way. All are partially wrong also. The truth of the matter can be arrived at by picking up a point from each of the perceptions and combining them in right measure. Truth is multi-perceptual and is much more.

1.3. The Pluralistic Texture of Life and Faith

Reality is pluralistic. Singular and plural together compose language. One and many are two dimensions of life. They are complementary angles of approaching the reality. A single-track journey doesn't take anyone anywhere. A balanced diet of food requires various items in it. A rainbow cannot part with the various colours and shades it is endowed with. Beauty is proportioning diverse components. Policies appropriate several principles in it. Intellectual and emotional aspects compose life experiences. Spiritual and material facets together coin life. Life is a collection of plural items. Just one way does not suffice. Various faiths are needed for a meaningful life.

1.4. The Idea of 'Neighbour' Suggests Plurality

The idea of 'neighbour?' makes sense only in the above setting of plurality. The word 'neighbour', first and foremost, suggests someone other than oneself. There is someone else, along with me. 'Being many' or 'having more than one' is the essential meaning of the 'neighbour'. Secondly, a 'neighbour' is a person who lives near or next to another. He or she is geographically localized next door. It could be by chance or by choice. But, as a matter of fact, he or she shares the same neighbourhood or locality. He or she is thus a neighbour to me. Thirdly, irrespective of a geographical consideration, the word 'neighbour' refers to the 'other', i.e. other than I, me and mine. In this sense, the neighbour is someone who is different from me in certain respects. This difference can be in faith, ethnic traits, language, ideology, culture, and the like.

1.5. The Dialogical Implications of the Reality of 'Neighbour'

The word 'neighbour' suggests a dialogical idea. It is a double-faceted reality, as a coin is. 'Being a neighbour' necessarily includes both sides. Though only one side is seen at a time, the other side is irrefutably there. As one is a neighbour to another, so is the case vice versa. The idea of mutuality is basic to being a neighbour. These aspects are complementary to one another. As human beings, 'interaction' is the essential relation between neighbours. There is a dialogical relation between them. They meet each other. They respect and understand each other. They accept and appreciate each other. They love and serve each other. They support and promote each other. They are persistently present to each other. They share and share in the experiences of life with each other. They realize that they have a common origin, a common life and a common destiny in life. They walk together in life with a spirit of sharing the same life. They work together in life, geared towards the common goal of life. They are neighbours to each other.

2. CHARACTERISITICS AND CHALLENGES OF THE SOCIETAL CONTEXT

2.1 Limitations of the Created Existence

The entire global reality is bound by limits in being and reaching out. Obviously, whatever that is created can never be perfect in the full sense of the word. This phenomenon applies to the living beings, including human beings. Human-made systems are all the more affected by this observable fact. All the items of the creation are gripped under the limits of space and time. The spatial and temporal boundaries of the created beings give rise to limitations of diverse kinds. The characteristics of the created existence cause a complex situation of imperfections and failure of the network of life. Consequently, there emerges dissatisfaction and struggles in life. Needs and wants, along with the passionate ways and means of achieving them, clash with each other. In such a predicament, the balance of social life is bound to get disturbed, in more or less degrees. Perhaps, nothing much can be done with regard to the basic phenomenon. But, an awareness of the fact could be useful in maintaining moderation.

2.2. Diversity of Life-Dimensions

Diversity is the brilliance of the creation. It has in it two facets – being many and being different. ‘Being many’ refers to the plurality of the reality. ‘Being different’ refers to the specificity’ or ‘individuality’ of each item. Both together make life. They are like two wheels of the same vehicle. They complete each other. The beauty of the variety of life is best pictured in a ‘rainbow’. There are in it different colours and their shades. In their separated state they do not attract anyone. But, when they are together, they radiate a ‘beauty’ that is par excellence. Similarly, human life has a large spectrum of diversities – ethnic, linguistic, racial, caste, class, ideological, professional, religious, national, cultural, and the like. When communities are constituted based on the above dimensions of social life, maintaining the equilibrium of social life, especially amidst a large number of people, becomes a task that is a tall like ‘himaalay’. A consolidated approach of all communities that represents the diverse dimensions of life is the elementary requirement for unity. That is the challenge before the human society, as well.

2.3. Unilateral Perspectives of Life

Perceptions of life are as many as there are human beings. Each ideology, religious faith, social tradition and cultural approach presents different perspectives. It is indeed difficult to judge which is right and which is wrong and to what degree something is right or wrong, etc. Becoming aware of other perceptions, religious or other, that are

equally valid and meaningful, is the first step towards a harmonious life. Getting to know the other perspectives and accepting appreciatively some of them are inevitable for a social life. But, instead of interacting with other ideologies and traditions, often people tend to consider their own positions right and that of others wrong. This state of affairs can be compared to a ‘taanga horse’, whose sides are blocked so that the driver can have complete control over the horse. Such unilateral thinking is not in line with civilized ways. It goes independent and makes its followers dependent and blind regarding their beliefs. Interaction and inter-dependence between communities are crucial for a meaningful human life. One-sided perspectives have become a major challenge to peaceful co-existence, especially in the cosmopolitan life of the globalized society of today.

2.4. Clash of Interests and Civilizations

Different human civilizations have emerged from different ethnical, social and cultural contexts. Exaggerated understanding of the ideologies of different communities makes it difficult for one to accommodate other views and streams of thought. Besides, globalization has made the world smaller. People of different civilizations, cultures, ideologies, traditions and nationalities are bound to interact and work with each other for co-existence and for developmental activities. The cut-throat competition in the diverse areas of social life make those with limited resources get sidelined. Smaller establishments seem to run the risk of being swallowed up by major establishments. The insecurity of minor concerns creates in them a crisis of identity. While majority communities wish to capture power to rule over, minority communities are bound to struggle for existence. Clash of interests and civilizations causes reactions to mount up in the society.

2.5. Fundamentalist and Communal Inclinations

Fundamentals form the foundation of any ideology, religious or secular. The sustainability of any system requires faithfulness to its fundamentals. But, addiction to fundamentals becomes a pathological case. A fundamentalist holds fast to the tenets formulated in the past. He or she lives in the past. He or she has stopped thinking. Since the creativity is already arrested, nothing new occurs in his or her mind. He or she is not fortunate to live in the present and to travel towards the future. He or she becomes infatuated with a set of dead ideas, rituals and traditions. A group of such fundamentalists move into a fanatic mindset that fixes certain ways in the mind for ever and in superlative degrees. They become communal by way of being coiled around themselves. ‘A frog in the well’ is the best example for fundamentalists and communalists. Such people cannot have any neighbour or if ever they have some, they are not able to recognize them. They become a world by themselves. The positive

values and value-based principles of life do not mean anything to them. They face an untimely death. Their condition is like the one who is not buried even though dead.

3. BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS AND MEANINGS

3.1. God as ‘Father’ as Fundamental to Life and Faith

The word ‘father’ symbolizes the basic relation between the creating and created realities. It stands for the widest relational category of life and covers all relational categories found in other faith traditions. It is like a large umbrella that brings together the entire creation in one single fold. Human beings, therefore, are empowered to relate to the divine in a very personal manner. The understanding of ‘God as Father’ is rooted in the personal experience of Jesus. The filial experience of Jesus (Mt 3.17, p.1096; 17.5, p.1114; Jn 5.19, p.1211; Jn 14.9,10,11 p.1227; Jn 15.1, p.1227; 17.10,11, p.1230; Lk 10.22, p.1180; Lk 23.34,46, p.1201) is broadened (Mt 6.4, 6,8,18,26,30,32, p.1099; Mt 10.29-31, p.1105; Mt 20.1-16, p.1118) to include the entire human effort to reach the divine. Experiencing oneself as the son/daughter of God would mean understanding God as Father. This filial experience is a spirituality of freedom that elevates one from the state of a mere creature/servant to the status of a son/daughter of God (Jn 15.15, p.1228). This experience is open to all the sectors of the society and is beyond the boundaries of gender, caste, class, creed, profession, language, culture, and the like. The Christian understanding of God as Father is fundamental to human life and it offers great possibilities of multi-faith and human implications.

3.2. Fraternal Way of life the Christian Identity

The filial experience of God as Father by Jesus has direct bearing on his fraternal attitude to fellow human beings. The vertical relation expresses itself in a horizontal one. Both together make the idea of God a perfect blend of theory and practice. The filial experience facilitated a realization that all human beings are ‘the sons and daughters of the same God’ and so are brothers and sisters in a universal manner. Such a spiritual way of being human facilitates one to love even one’s enemy and not to discriminate between one’s friend and enemy, as Jesus did on the cross as well as in life. A culture of being fraternal, beyond the boundaries of the virtuous and the unrighteous (Mt 5.43-48, p.1099) is of a highly spiritual quality. Establishing a loving relationship with every human being one is fortunate to meet in life and being of all possible service to him/her across all boundaries is what is meant by the new culture of love that is implied by the fraternal attitude according to Jesus. Being a disciple to Jesus or being a Christian would mean just this. Such a fraternal life style has unlimited universal possibilities and implications for a neighbourly way of living one’s life and for the wellness of the society.

3.3. The Parable of the Good Samaritan ‘Who is My Neighbour’?

The parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10.20-37, p.1180-81) presents a man who fell into the hands of the robbers on one side, and on the other, three persons -- the priest and the Levite who passed by on the other side and the Samaritan who took care of him to the detail. Jesus poses a question to the experts of law, ‘which of the above three persons was a neighbour to the victim?’ The spontaneous reply followed, ‘the one who had mercy on him’. The concluding remark of Jesus, ‘go and do likewise’, answers the fundamental question ‘who is my neighbour’ in a decisive and exhaustive manner. The entire episode raises a series of questions regarding who my neighbour is and its larger connotations.

3.4. Implications of the Question ‘Who is my Neighbour’?

The good gesture of the Samaritan is to be understood against its social setting. The merit of the act is to be measured in terms of the great spiritual values that are concealed in it. The Samaritans and the Jews had no dealings with each other. They were as if mutual enemies for mainly religious reasons. They would remain poles apart, as if untouchables. Unexpectedly enough, the Samaritan crossed spontaneously even the boundaries of hostility as regards race and religion and of deep-seated bitterness. He did not take refuge in traditional excuses to escape attending to the injured man. He showed compassion. He opted for being a nurse to perform first aid on him. He used his resources of wine and oil for cleaning and soothing his wounds respectively. He extended to him the service of his donkey. He took the trouble of taking him to the inn, spent his money for the services, generously offered to come back the next day to take care of his extra expenses. He spent time and money as well as took interest and trouble for the wounded man. All these gestures were motivated by an attitude of love, that too to a so-called stranger. While the lawyer was interested in arguing and the priest and Levite were interested in their stipulated rituals, the Samaritan proved himself to the unfortunate man as a real ‘neighbour’ in all its implications.

3.5. My Neighbour as My ‘Brother and Sister’

Cain asked the Lord, ‘Am I my brother’s keeper?’ (Gen 4.9, p.5). He asked this counter-question in order to evade answering the question. His intention was to disown the responsibility of having murdered his brother. This was a negative approach. Mary answered this question positively and in action. She sensed the sense of shame and struggle of the host when he had no more wine to serve his guests. She proved that ‘she was her brother’s keeper’ (Jn 2. 1-11, p.1206) by requesting Jesus to do the needful and by supporting the host of the marriage feast. It was enough for Mary and

Jesus to be within the limits of a guest. But, she went out of the way and owned the embarrassment of the host, who was running short of wine, and forced a miracle out of Jesus in favour of the host. There is a fundamental sisterly-brotherly relation in life and the resultant concern that motivates gestures like these. Such are the fruits of one's faith. Jesus summarized religion and life, saying 'Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did it for me' (Mt 25:40, p.1128). There is no vertical imperative towards God the Heavenly Father that is undone when the horizontal demands towards one's sisters and brothers are fulfilled, that too with a fine sense of details. 'Neighbour' in the covenant contexts or in the Biblical tradition, especially in the New Testament of Jesus, conveys a powerful sense of relationship as 'brother' or 'sister'.

3.6. My neighbour as my 'friend'

A friend is an 'acquaintance'. He or she can be a 'fellow member of a given community'. The word could mean 'everyone a person comes in contact with' also. In the Old Testament, the term 'neighbour' was used when referred to matters connected to mutual obligations and dealings of Israelites (giving false testimony against one's neighbour (Ex 20:16, p.86), coveting one's neighbour's wife or possessions (Ex 20:17, p.86), defrauding a neighbour (Lev 19:13, p.134), sharing one's property (Ex 22:7-9, p.88), lending to one's neighbour without charging interest (Deut 15:2, p.215) and loving one's neighbour as oneself (Lev 19:18, p.134). In the New Testament, Jesus tells the disciples, 'I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to You' (Jn 15:15, p.1228). Friend has access to the inner forum of the master. The stranger or the other or the neighbour is given entry into the inner space of the master as if a friend. The status of a friend extended to the other or the neighbour with its deeper implications is reiterated by Jesus in other words, 'greater love has no one than this that he lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command' (Jn 15: 13-14, p. 1228). The entire Biblical tradition is brimming forth with the mutually overlapping implications of the words 'neighbour' and 'friend'.

3.7. My Neighbour as My 'Companion'

A companion denotes a deeper dimension of a friend. There is a bond of liking and trust built up over years. Companionship is marked by some degree of intimacy, as well. It reflects a great degree of loyalty on either ends. In the OT David and Jonathan (1 Sam 20, p.325-27) and Ruth and Naomi (Ruth 1:16-18, p.297; 2:11, p.298) are known to be models of trustworthy companions or friends. The Book of Proverbs emphasizes loyalty, total honesty and intimacy in the following sayings -- 'a friend

loves at all times' (Prov 17:17, p.734) and 'faithful are the wounds of a friend' (Prov 27:6, p.745). Moses was identified as a 'friend of God' and it reflected his being rooted in his loyalty to the Lord and God's willingness to speak directly to him 'as a man speaks with his friend' (Ex 33:11, p.78). Jesus used the term 'friend', perhaps lightly at times, as a form of address (Mt 20:13, p.1118; Lk 5:20, p.1170). Jesus was angrily charged by his Pharisees as 'a friend of tax collectors and sinners' (Lk 7:34, p.1174; Mt 9:11, p.1103), which simply meant that he associated freely with them and that they responded to him with liking and trust. Jesus spoke of his disciples as 'friends' when he had in mind a far greater 'commitment'. Jesus demonstrated his loyalty by laying down his life for his friends (Jn 15:13, p.1228). The loyalty of the disciples to Jesus is to be shown by doing what Christ commands (Jn 15:14, p.1228). Friendship with God is expressed by complete loyalty to him (Jas 4:4, p.1379). The phrase 'dear friends' appears in some modern versions, translating a Greek word that means 'beloved' (2 Cor 7:1, p. 1316; 1 Pet 2:11, p. 1386; 1 Jn 2:7, p.1394). The other or the neighbour seems to gain much deeper meanings like an 'intimate or beloved companion' in the above references.

3.8. Love Your Neighbour as a 'New Law'

'Love your neighbour as yourself' (Lk 10:27, p.1180; Lev 19:18, p.134; Mt 5:43, p.1099) is a dictum that is inherited from the Old Testament of the Bible. The New Testament restates the command, 'Love your neighbour', no less than nine times (Mt 5:43, p.1099; Mt 19:19, p.1117; Mt 22:39, p.1122; Mk 12:31,33, p.1153; Lk 10:27, p.11870; Rom 13:9, p.1291; Gal 5:14, p.1327; Jas 2:8, p.1380). The interpretation given by Jesus through the parable of the Good Samaritan is totally new and vivid. The whole setting of the parable was the question of inheriting eternal life and the stipulations of the law to that effect. There is a major shift of paradigm in the application of the law and the means of inheriting eternal life according to Jesus. The question was raised by an expert in the law. Jesus chose as his hero a member of a neighbouring race whom the Jews viewed with contempt. When the Jewish traveller was robbed and beaten, it was no priest or Levite who stopped to help the victim; it was a Samaritan. In Jesus' story, race did not count. Jesus, affirming the most extended use of the word, exhorted the seeker to 'go and do likewise' as the 'new law' that is interpreted so clearly and to the details. Even the 'expert in the Jewish law' couldn't help admitting the fact that the Samaritan had fulfilled a neighbour's obligation by helping the injured man. That is the real law of the humans.

3.9. Love Your Neighbour as 'Neighbourly Service to the Needy'

Neighbourliness is a simple matter of humanity. It is a matter of a relationship between one person in need and another able to assist him. The maxim 'a friend in need is a

friend indeed' makes sense at all times. A help is best appreciated when one is badly in need of it. Food tastes the best when one is really hungry. One enjoys sleep the best when one feels sleepy. One should extend his or her service to others in times of their need. Neighbourly and fraternal expressions are to be performed to the weaker sections of the society in a preferential manner. They suffer the pangs of dire need in life, of diverse sorts. A special concern for the oppressed and the marginalized fellow human beings is a unique note on the side of Jesus (Lk 19.1-10, p.1193; Lk 16.19-31, p.1190; Lk 15.1-32, p.1188-89; Lk 5.30-32, p. 1170; Lk 23.34, p.1201; Mt 5.43-48, p.1099; Mt 18.1-5, p.1115; Jn 8.1-11, p.1216-17; I Cor 1.26-29, p.1297). Establishing a loving relationship with every human being one meets in life and being of all possible service to him or her as one's immediate neighbour is the new culture of neighbourly service that was lived and promoted by Jesus. Divisive considerations do not have any place in the mind of Jesus. Being a disciple to Jesus or a being Christian would mean 'being of neighbourly service to all, especially those in real need'. The wellbeing of the human society can be ensured only by lovingly attending to one's neighbours, whom we know to be in need. The model for such humble and neighbourly service to one's fellow human beings is the powerful and life-giving words of Jesus, 'now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet' (Jn 13.14, p. 1225).

3.9. A Network of Neighbourly Behaviour to One and All

A neighbourly behaviour to one another is best seen as an organized network of life in 'one body, many parts', as highlighted by Paul (1 Cor. 12.12-28, p. 1306-07). 'One body, many parts', is a commonplace example that applies to all living beings. It has special implications in the context of human beings. Paul analyzes the dynamics of the human body in detail and unearths its deeper implications, mainly as regards connectedness. He elaborates the reality of the body that exists in parts but functions together. He draws a striking parallel with the essential relatedness among human beings while they exist as individuals. He gives emphasis to the mystery of life that is inbuilt in the spirit of complementariness and togetherness in a comparative way between the human body and human life. All the parts of the body have their own individual dignity and autonomy that are worthy of equal respect. The joy and sorrow in one part of the body is equally shared by all other parts. The system does not admit any discrimination among the parts. This is the type of shared life that is expected of human beings. Jesus summarized the norm in a capsule form when he said, 'so in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you' (Mt 7.12, p.1100) and 'love one another, as I have loved you' (Jn 13.34, p.1226). 'Being neighbourly, one to another', in terms of one's faith, ideology, race, ethnic traits, caste, class, profession, culture and nationality, is what is meant by human life in summary form.

4. MULTI-FAITH IMPLICATIONS

4.1. Specificity of Religions

The religious streams have originated from different sources. The background and settings of their emergence are varied. The great men or women who were mediators of divine promptings were of dissimilar character. The quality of spiritual accomplishment and the personal experiences of the seers and sages were beyond the scope of being compared with that of the neighbours. The contexts in which they had their being were different, too. The human and spiritual values they upheld were unlike with that of others. The vision and mission of their lives characterized the genius of the respective religious tradition. Accordingly, each religious tradition developed its own specific traits. The individual moral fiber of the religious traditions is unique. This distinctive character needs to be honoured and mutually benefited from. The specificity of each religious tradition, as reflected in its world view, perception, interpretations, regulations and practices, are sacrosanct and is not to be violated. All traditions have a role to play in the design of the Creator.

4.2. Colloquium of World Religions and Cultures

Religions underline the presence of a Creative Power that is responsible for the origin of the entire visible world. The great men and women who are considered Founders of religions had their base in that Power. The ethnic traits, languages, ideologies, professions, social customs, religious traditions and cultures have their roots in the same source. The world classics as well as Sacred Scriptures of all religious traditions are the processed result of the promptings from above. Therefore, it is to be accepted that the social and cultural streams of the society are gifts of the same Creator to the world. They are not the private property of any individual or community. They are the common cultural heritage of the human society. The world needs all of them. That is why they are there. No one has the license to monopolize, dominate over, control or eliminate any of them. All of them deserve due respect and require to have a humble disposition. 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' is the right perspective. 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. The world religions and cultures exist together as a single unit. They belong to each other in mutual relation. They belong to the Creator together. They form a colloquium of world religions and cultures. Together, they radiate a singular beauty, like the rainbow. And each unit is as if a 'neighbour' to each other.

4.3. Exploring the Commonalities in Religions in a Neighbourly Spirit

Although the religious traditions emerged at different geographical areas and times of history and their social and cultural contexts were different, it is obvious that at a wide spectrum they have a common source and a common origin. They have a common existence or a shared platform to exist. They have a common destiny and destination to reach, as well. There have a large range of experiences that are similar to each other. They have a common ground to meet and a common search to make. They have to travel the path of life together and make a joint pilgrimage to the same Creator and source of life. Therefore, as neighbours to each other, religious traditions should be in creative interaction and fellowship with other religious affiliations. There are various universal values that are present in all religious traditions and that are capable of making the human being more humane and spiritual. The similarity in the multifarious symbols, theories and practices are to be further searched for. They have to identify the common enemy of irreligion that is hiding in the respective religious campuses and attempt to eliminate it, so that the 'real neighbour' ingrained in each of them may become explicit and active. They have to play responsible sociological roles together for the welfare of the entire society. They have to contribute to the making of a better tomorrow. The commonalities of the religious traditions facilitate the making of a well-knit country and human society. For this, appropriating a neighbourly attitude to each other is crucial.

4.4. Shared Identity of Religions as Neighbours

An earthly existence, may it be in the form of a living being or a non-living being, has an identity of its own. A tradition also, may it be social or religious, as any human being, possesses an identity. This is essential for being recognized in its unique character. Identity has two dimensions -- individual and social. Every individual religious tradition has its own exceptional traits. The distinctive character enables one to belong to that particular tradition. Parting with this individuality is not possible, even at the level of a thought. But the social dimension would require every religious tradition to be inter-connected. The world human society has various religious traditions and they share an identity with each other. This social identity is the common identity that is shared by all the traditions. All the religious traditions have emerged from the human environment and they are human traditions. They cannot be totally estranged from each other. The sociological settings are foundational to the shared identity of religious and other traditions. As neighbours to each other in the same geographical area, as citizens of the same country or as members of the same world human society, all the religious traditions share the basic human character. The difference in the individual identities, like ethnic, linguistic, religious, ideological, social and cultural belongings, are complementary to each other. Singular

characteristics of the individual religious traditions are to be maintained and developed. But common features of the shared identity of religious traditions are to be consistently explored, too. Differences and commonalities of the civilizations are as if two sides of the same coin. One does not make sense without the other. Shared identity sharpens the individual identity, as well. Consciousness of the common identity will facilitate a 'we-feeling' and will contribute to a spirit of togetherness as 'neighbours' among the totality of religious traditions. That is the culture of 'neighbouring other religions' that is creditable to the human culture.

4.5. Stress on the Universal Human and Spiritual Values

The faith-based traditions have to undergo the process of identifying the human and spiritual values that are inherent in their respective faith traditions. These values need to be fostered. The leaders and followers of religions have to imbibe the spirit of these values and live them. Emphasis has to be placed more on these values of religions rather on their rituals and doctrines. These values will carry similarity among them and will help people of all traditions to come closer to each other. They will be useful in recognizing the underlying basic identity of a 'human being' amidst the multiple identities that the humans have accumulated over the years. Every value has a universal aspect in it. The universal values thus identified in all faith traditions establish the basic relatedness of human beings. The faith or religious system that is useful for human beings is one that elevates the followers to a higher plane of 'neighbourliness' to one another.

4.6. Religions to facilitate Social Transformation

Change is the inner dynamics of life. Where there is no change there is no life. To live would mean to keep changing. Change takes place gradually and degree by degree. It is a process. To initiate change is to go beyond the present form. Change is transformation. By and large, change is for the better. When a better form appears there is transformation. Transformation of the society is social transformation. Transformed individuals contribute to transforming the social structures. Change does not start with others. Change launches with oneself. The proof of the change in oneself is attempting to elicit change in others and in the society. Commitment to the betterment of the society is leadership. A leader is someone who does the right thing even when no one else does. To have right personal initiatives is the basic characteristic of a leader. Those who wait for someone else to set an example before they act are followers. Leaders create role models for making the type of society they want. A leader has to break new grounds, travel new paths and be an evidence for the goal the path leads to. One's religion or faith has to facilitate one to have the mindset and caliber of a leader. Religious leadership is an innate quality. Real leaders are born.

Genuine leadership is spiritual in its nature. One's religious, moral and spiritual heights have to enable one to pursue a leadership role for social transformation. Social transformation would mean tuning the mindset of persons to care for the other, especially the needy. Leadership supported by one's religion includes responding to the basic needs, fighting against unjust structures, advocacy for reducing negative tendencies, balancing rights and duties, ensuring socio-cultural interaction, peaceful co-existence and harmonious living. Religious persons and communities have to spontaneously undertake such transforming leadership for the wellbeing of the society. This has to be the collaborative endeavour of people of neighbour communities.

4.7. Religions as Neighbours to Make a More Harmonious Society

Making a More Harmonious Society has to be the common motto of all faith-based individuals, organizations and communities. Individual faith-based organizations have to make sustained efforts for ensuring harmony in social life in their respective area of operation. All faith-based organizations and communities have to collaborate in the shared mission of making a better society or making a more harmonious society. Faith-based organizations and communities have to be connected and networked with each other for guiding the destinies of the increasingly globalized society of today. One has to get creatively related to other perceptions and communities of faith while remaining rooted in one's own. Joining hands with other faith communities in order to foster harmonious living is the grown up way of living one's faith. Dialogue and interaction begin when people meet each other. People should stop meeting as Hindus or Muslims and theists or atheists. People should meet as human beings and make friendship with each other and collaborate with each other for making a better society. Human beings have similar aspirations and sentiments. Building bridges of understanding and friendship among people of different religions and ethnic groups is the most meritorious work of human beings. Good will, interaction, good relations and mutual collaboration have to be maintained among people of all backgrounds and persuasions. Religious leaders have to stress universal values inherent in their respective tradition. Those values that have a universal appeal and have an acceptance beyond the set boundaries are values proper. They strengthen the human civilization to travel the path of eternity. They are spiritual as well as human values. They help the process of making good human beings. Becoming good human beings is the ultimate merit in life. Only good human beings can contribute to making a harmonious society. Those individuals and communities that claim to have a religion have to sharpen their commitment to this sublime task and make a humane and spiritual difference in the world they have their being. In this respect, the great challenge before religion and religions is 'do or die'. This is the neighbourly understanding of religions in action.

4.8. Towards a Culture of neighbourliness among religions

‘Leave the place better than You found it’ is a dictum that can motivate one to commit oneself to a plan of action for making a more harmonious and better society, by way of fostering a culture of neighbourliness. Human life, irrespective of place or time or of its dimensions, is limited. So it is natural that there are challenges to harmonious living. For that reason, addressing the problems of human life is an indispensable part in the life schedule. Social maladies, like discrimination in the name of gender, race, caste, class, creed, language, profession, ideology and social mores, have to be effectively treated. Serious measures are to be chalked out for making the society free of riot and tension. There have to be schemes that facilitate introspection into one’s religious ways. Deeper implications of one’s faith have to be unearthed. One’s own religious faith has to be broadened towards a circle of all faiths. Familiarity with the religious values of the other has to be fostered. Learning from the religious values of one’s neighbour has to be a regular practice. Joint humanitarian schemes have to be evolved by different religious communities for making the society more neighbourly in all respects. Leaders and followers of the respective religious communities have to work together with a democratic spirit. Making personal friendship in the communities of the other has to be accepted as the test of one’s growth as a human being as well as a religious. Getting mutually enriched and finding co-pilgrims in other persuasions has to be the guiding principle in life. One has to broaden the boundaries of one’s ‘home’ to one’s neighbourhood and the village/town/city of belonging and to the area of personal relations and operation of work. The ‘we-feeling’ or ‘neighbourliness’ should facilitate one to find a ‘larger home’ beyond all set margins. Constituting a ‘Neighbourhood Forums’ of persons of such wider mindset will be useful to take off with initiatives for maintaining the society in a spirit of harmony. Such ‘Forums’ could be task forces and catalysts in the society as a curative measure for resolving communal conflicts and as a preventive means through sustained efforts for avoiding communal disturbances and for promoting harmony in social life. Religious faith and human education is relevant and meaningful only when a culture of neighbourliness governs the destiny of human life.

CONCLUSION

Ushering in a ‘culture of neighbourliness among faith communities’ is a great dream the stake-holders of faith have to realize at the earliest, at least to a considerable degree, lest they make faith irrelevant. The educated and the enlightened men and women of the society also have to envisage ways and means of going beyond the superficial multiple identities of the humans and of recognizing the fundamental and real identity of the humans as ‘human being’ who is inevitably ‘related to each other as a neighbour’, irrespective of their backgrounds and persuasions. The ‘treasure’ seems

to be placed on a very high plane and the pace of the humans seems to be very slow in their journey towards attaining it. A deeper commitment to the multi-faith and multi-cultural style of living one's human life, I suppose, will go a long way in answering the question 'who is my neighbour?', in a spiritual manner.

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