

INDIA FOUNDATION JOURNAL



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- The Population Time Bomb: Impact on National Integration - Dhruv C. Katoch

Focus: An Agenda for Unity: Promoting Inter-Religious Harmony

- An Agenda for Living Together - Ram Madhav
- Religious Harmony: A Unifying Bond - Swami Mitrananda & Ananthakrishnan Seshadri
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Interview

- An Agenda for Unity: An Interview with **Shri Krishna Gopal**, Sah-Sarkaryawah, Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh (RSS) - Swadesh Singh

International Relations

- Chinese Aggressiveness in the Region: An Analysis - Dhruv C. Katoch
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India Foundation is an independent research centre focussed on the issues, challenges, and opportunities of the Indian polity. The Foundation believes in understanding contemporary India and its global context through the civilizational lens of a society on the forward move. Based on the principles of independence, objectivity and academic rigour, the Foundation aims at increasing awareness and advocating its views on issues of both national and international importance.

With a team of dedicated professionals based at its office in New Delhi, the Foundation works with partners and associates both in India and overseas to further its stated objectives.

About India Foundation Journal

The India Foundation Journal is led by an Editorial Board of eminent scholars and leaders from various spheres of Indian public life. The bi-monthly journal covers a wide range of issues pertinent to the national interest, mainly focusing on international relations, national security, legal and constitutional issues and other issues of social, religious and political significance. The journal seeks articles from scholars with the intent of creating a significant body of knowledge with a nationalist perspective and establish a recognised forum for debates involving academicians and policymakers.

The Population Time Bomb: Impact on National Integration

Dhruv C Katoch*

Introduction

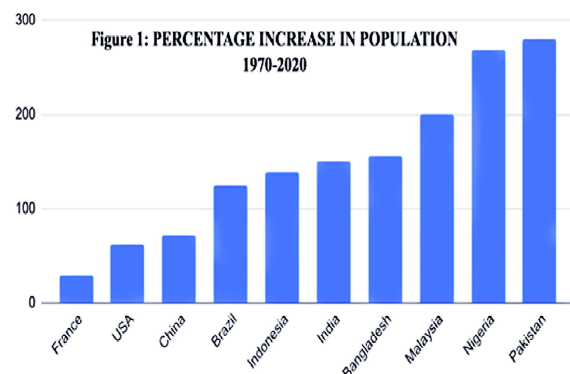
Population dynamics have an impact on a country's economic and strategic capabilities. Sparsely populated countries may face strategic challenges, but large populations are not necessarily a blessing. An unbridled population growth can greatly hinder the development process, besides adversely impacting on the environment.

An article published in 2011,¹ on the implications and trends of India's demographic outlook, came out with estimates of what India's demography will look like in 2030. The article stated that as per UNDP projections, India's population will exceed China's by 2025, and that the crossover will in all probability occur well before that time, making India the most populous country in the world. This article was extremely prescient in its predictions, as India is set to overtake China's population sometime in 2023, but more ominously, the article has predicted that India's population by 2030 will be in the region of 1.5 billion people. Is this sustainable and can India afford to go down that path? What are the fissiparous tendencies that such a growth can have on Indian society? These questions need to be asked and more importantly, need to be addressed with urgency.

Population Growth over the last five decades: World Comparison

How has the world's population increased over

the last five decades? Statistics from 1970 onwards indicate that the Western world has successfully

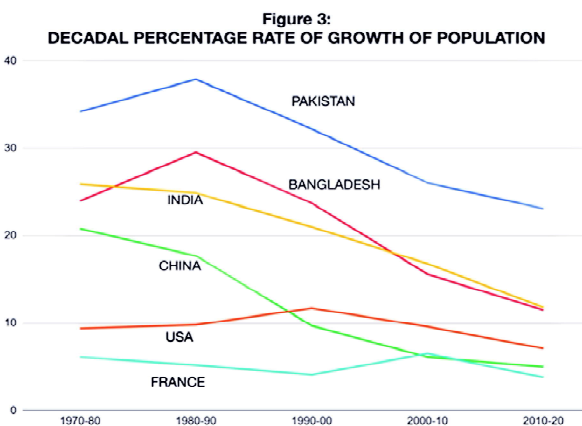
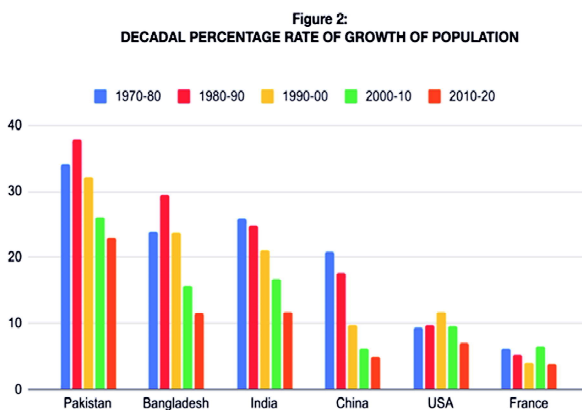


kept a lid on population growth. China too has been remarkably successful in controlling its population. However, most Asian and African countries have seen unprecedented population growth, which has hindered economic growth, created vast disparities between different economic groups, created water stress and food scarcity and led to fissures in society. All of these factors combined together have led to dismal standards of living for vast multitudes of people across the globe. Percentage increase in population over the last half century for 10 countries is given in Figure 1.²

The decadal growth rate of population also makes an interesting study (Figures 2 and 3).³ Both the US and France, over the last half century, have had a decadal growth of population below 10 percent for the period 1970-2020. This is true for most of the Western world. Low population growth has been a contributory factor to their ability to

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provide a high standard of living to their people and being classified as first world countries. China, which imposed a one child policy on its populace in September 1980 saw only a marginal decline in population growth for the first decade after the policy was introduced. The decade 1970-1980, prior to the introduction of the policy saw a decadal



increase in population of 20.8 percent. In the first decade after the implementation of the one-child policy (1980-1990), there was but a marginal decline, with decadal population growth at 17.7 percent. This indicates that the one-child policy was widely flouted by most residents. The next

two decades saw decadal population growth dropping to below 10 percent, and for the decade 2010-2020, the population growth was just 5 percent. This is comparable to the population growth in France, which saw a decadal population growth hovering between 4 to 6 percent for the five decades 1970-2020. The US has also maintained for the most part, decadal population growth under 10 percent for the last five decades.

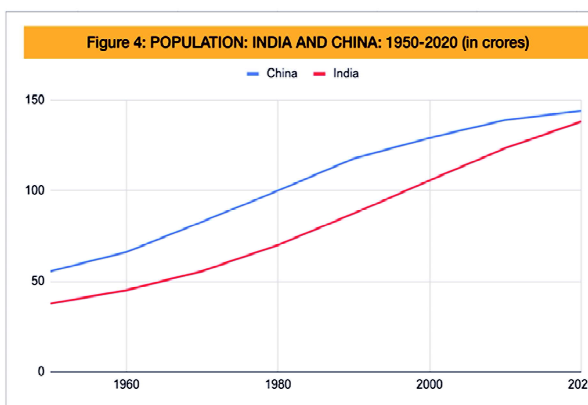
In the Asian subcontinent, the situation has unfortunately spiralled out of control. In Pakistan, the decadal population growth has been in excess of 30 percent for each of the three decades 1970-2000. A marginal decrease has taken place post 2000, with decadal population growth reducing to 26 percent and 23 percent for the decades 2000-2010 and 2010-2020 respectively. In real terms, the population of Pakistan has increased 3.8 times in the last half century (1970-2020) and about seven times since the country achieved independence in 1947. This is clearly unsustainable. Bangladesh also has high decadal population growth, though their performance is far better than Pakistan. For the period 1970-1980, decadal population growth was 24 percent. This rose to 29.5 percent in the decade 1980-1990, which indicates that in the earlier decade following the Liberation War, large scale migration of population had taken place from Bangladesh to India. Thereafter, decadal population growth witnessed a slight decline with population growth at 24 percent. Since then, population control measures appear to have been more successful, with decadal population growth at 15.6 percent and 11.5 percent for the period 2000-2010 and 2010-2020 respectively.

The statistics for India too are not very flattering and resemble to some extent the statistics of Bangladesh. The three decades 1970-2000 saw the decadal population growth hover between 26 percent and 21 percent. This is high and reflects a failure of the nation's family planning programme. The decadal population growth dropped below 20 percent for the next two decades, touching 16.8 percent in 2000-2010 and falling further to 11.8 percent for the decade 2010-2020. This is still high though it now appears that India is closer to getting to grips with the problem. What remains of serious concern, however, is the wide variation in population growth between different parts of the country as also between different communities, which potentially can cause severe fissures in Indian society.

India and China: A Statistical Analysis

At times, when development or rather the lack of it is linked to excessive population growth, the nay-sayers promptly state that poor economic development is not due to unbridled population growth but due to socio-economic factors. Then they justify their assumption by giving a reference to China, quoting its spectacular economic growth despite it being the most populous country in the world. This is simply intellectual dishonest. Undoubtedly, poor socio-economic policies hinder economic growth, but unbridled population growth negates even the most pragmatic of economic policies and will invariably result in weakening poverty alleviation programmes. China's spectacular rise is a result of strict measures to restrict family size; had such measures not been taken, the picture in China would have been rather gloomy.

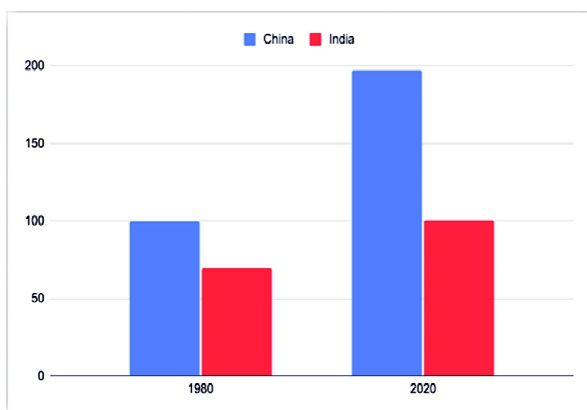
A comparison of population data between India and China—the world's two most populous countries is indeed instructive. Figure 4⁴ shows the population of India and China from 1950 till 2020. China's population, which stood at 55.44 crore in 1950 had almost doubled over the course of the next three decades to 100 crores by 1980. This was when China began its family planning programme, with its one child policy. In 2020, 40 years later, China's population stood at 143.93 crore, an increase of just under 44 percent. In comparison, for the period 1950-1980, China's population had increased a whopping 80 percent. Had China continued with such a high rate of population growth, it would have crossed the two billion level mark by now (figure 5). What would be the impact on China if it had another 600 million mouths to feed and look after, can only be speculated, but undoubtedly, China would have still



been a third world country. As of now, while China's decadal population growth has reduced to single digits, it is still higher than most European countries.

Now let us take a look at India. India's population stood at 37.63 crore in 1950. In terms of comparison, this is less than the present-day

Figure 5: Hypothetical Scenario:
If India's population had grown at China's rate between 1970 and 2020, and China's population had grown at India's rate during the same time-frame: China's would be at about 2 billion and India at 1 billion.



combined population of Pakistan and Bangladesh. By 1980, India's population had surged to 69.89 crore, indicating a growth of 85 percent. At this stage, India's and China's rate of population growth were almost similar. Over the next 40 years, the situation changed dramatically. In 2020, India's population stood at 138 crores, an increase of a staggering 97 percent! Had India been successful in controlling its population as China had done, its present population would have been just over one billion (Figure 5). With 400 million less people, unemployment in India would have been minimal, the cities would not be bursting, pollution levels would have been under control and in all likelihood, India would have been a middle-income country.

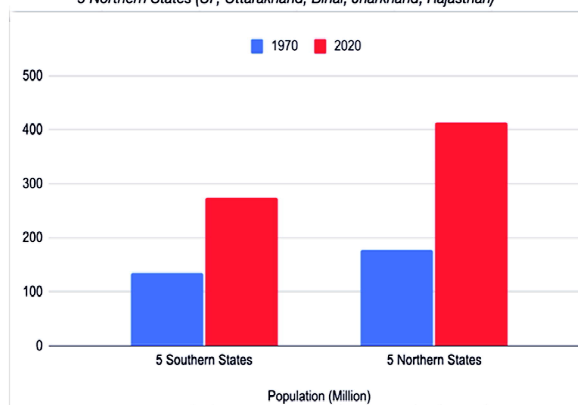
Population Dynamics: Internal Fissures

The population growth of India is an area of concern, but more ominous is the fact that this population growth is uneven and could potentially create serious fissures in society on two counts. The first is related to a Constitutional provision.

Article 81 of the Indian Constitution lays down the distribution of seats to each state based on their population, while Article 82 provides for the readjustment of seats in the Lower House, after each census. This delimitation was suspended in 1976 till the 2001 census, primarily because the Southern states had achieved a higher degree of population control than the states in the North. This was again postponed to 2026 by the 84th Amendment. In the revised allocation, the Northern states would have got a larger share than the South,⁵ which effectively meant rewarding those states that were less effective in promoting small family norms.

For the period 1970-2020, the population of five northern states viz. Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Bihar, Jharkhand and Rajasthan showed an increase in population of 178 percent. These states have a combined representation of 164 seats in Parliament as of 2019. Based on the above, in terms of the Constitution, these five states will get seats in proportion to their population increase. Their seat share thus increases by 178 percent to a total of 455 seats.

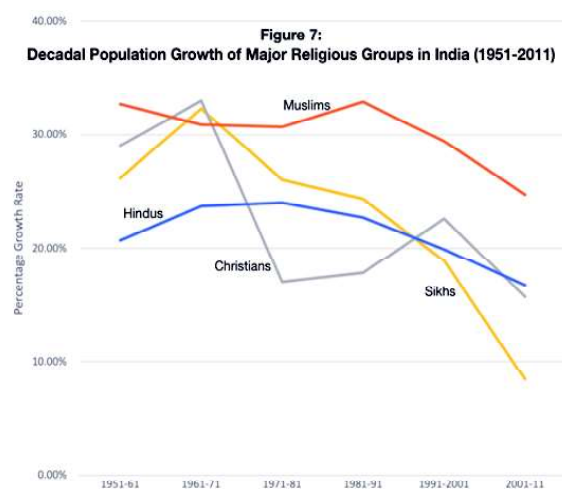
Figure 6: Uneven Growth of Population
 5 Southern States (Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana)
 And
 5 Northern States (UP, Uttarakhand, Bihar, Jharkhand, Rajasthan)



In the five southern states of Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, the states have a combined representation of 129 seats in Parliament as of 2019. The combined population of these five states increased by 102 percent over the period 1970-2020. Based on the population increase of 102 percent, their share of seats in the Lok Sabha would increase by 102 percent to give them a revised seat share of 260 seats. Based on percentage increase of population, the Southern states hence stand to lose significantly in representation in the Lower House while the Northern states, which faulted on population control measures, stand to gain.

Increasing seat share based on proportional increase in population will hence disempower the South in comparison to the North, simply because they have carried out the required population control measures in a more effective manner than states in the Northern half of the country. This will create grounds for unrest with severe consequences. The solution hence would be to further defer the expansion, or to simply increase the number of seats in parliament in the same proportion as are currently existing. It must also be noted that even amongst the Southern states, population increase is not uniform as states like Kerala and Tamil Nadu have fared far better than Karnataka.

Religious fault lines too are beginning to appear because of uneven growth of different religious groups. Data available till the 2011 census indicates decadal population growth of all religious groups has declined but the rate of decline is different for different religious denominations (Figure 7).⁷ For each of the decades from 1951-2011, the decadal



growth of the Muslim population has been about 10 percentage points higher than non-Muslims. In 2011, while the decadal growth rate of non-Muslims is veering towards the 10 percent decadal growth mark, decadal growth of Muslim population remains above the 20 percent decadal growth mark. In states like West Bengal, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, UP and Assam, this is manifesting in societal tension which has the potential to lead to communal discord and splitting of communities on communal lines. Here too, as in the North-South divide, those religious groups which have been more effective in population control measures stand to lose out to those that have disregarded the same. Obviously, there is a need to implement strict family planning norms through a series of incentives and disincentives. The aim must be to get all groups to limit decadal population growth to between 0 and 5 percent.

To conclude, India as of now is on a cusp, where the country can break out as a middle-income country by 2047. This process will be greatly facilitated by the implementation of population control measures, uniformly across all

strata of society and across the length and breadth of the country. This needs to be a priority call for India's polity and civil society, to preserve the unity

and integrity of the nation, prevent fissiparous tendencies and for the economic welfare of all sections of India's population.

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- 2 *Data sourced from [macrotrends.net](https://www.macrotrends.net) for respective countries*
- 3 *Data sourced from World Bank Group*
- 4 *Data Sourced from the World Bank: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL?locations=CN> and <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL?locations=IN>*
- 5 *<https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/article-81-constitution-explained-why-lok-sabha-is-still-543-6067542/>*
- 6 *Data sourced from the Census of India*
- 7 *Data sourced from the Pew Research Centre.*



An Agenda for Living Together

Ram Madhav*

India is a land of extreme diversity – in language, social order, cuisine, customs and religion. Over millennia, it mastered the art of managing that diversity and maintaining unity.

*“Samaano Mantrah Samitih Samaani
Samaanam Manas Saha-Chittamesham”*

- This Rig Vedic mantra laid down conditions for living together for the diverse Indian society. It meant that “May our prayers be one; our brotherhood be one; our hearts be one”. Here the sages paused. They didn’t insist that “our minds also be one”. Acknowledging “freedom of thought”, they said - “May thinking minds be together”.

Traditionally, ‘diversity of thought and unity of heart’ has been the essence of Hindu civilisational philosophy. This catholicity allowed philosophical schools like Tarka and Mimansa – dialectics, reasoning, reflection and investigation – to flourish. Tolerance and acceptance became India’s main attributes.

Across the planet, the Semites in Europe thought differently. There was only “one truth” revealed by prophets, they insisted and called upon the followers to become “believers”. Those who questioned became infidels and kafirs. Intolerance became the hallmark of the Semitic faiths.

The issue of ‘living together’ acquired complexity in India when these two world-views – one, exploratory and inclusive and the other, determinist and exclusive; one, that advocated “seeking” and the other, that insisted on “belief” – came face-to-face with each other.

Christianity and Islam, the two Semitic faiths, entered India and succeeded in converting a large number of Indians. The tolerant Indian milieu did not find it objectionable until change of faith led to change of life for the converted. A new conflict was born when the neo-Semites started rejecting hoary principles of Indian ethos like “*Sarv Panth Samaadar*” (equal respect to all religions), “*Ekam Sat Viprah Bahudha Vadanti*” (truth is one, wise men interpret it differently).

Islam’s case is more intriguing. It came to India with the Islamic invader Mohammed bin Qasim in 712 CE. The next eight centuries saw waves of Arab, Turkish and Central Asian Muslim invaders attacking India. Although invasions across the Hindu Kush were not new, Islamic invasions differed from the earlier ones like Greeks, Huns, Sakas and Kushans. They brought medieval exclusivist, intolerant and iconoclastic Islam with them.

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Will Durant, the American historian called those conquests “probably the bloodiest story in history”. They resulted in acute mistrust, disunity and animosity between Hindus and Muslims.

Al-Biruni, the Iranian scholar, who came to India with the invading armies of Mahmood Ghaznavi in the early 11th century, pompously claimed that Islamic institutions were “much superior” and all the customs and usages of local communities were known for their “essential foulness”. He dismissed Hindus for “their ludicrous views” and called them “by nature niggardly...”. He also admitted that Ghazni’s iconoclasm had led to Hindus “cherish the most inveterate aversion toward all Muslims.”

Nearly three centuries later, Ibn Batuta, an explorer and traveller in the Islamic lands, observed that Hindus and Muslims lived in entirely separate communities. “It is the custom among the heathen of the Malabar country that no Muslim should enter their houses or use their vessels for eating purposes. If a Muslim is fed out of their vessels, they either break the vessels or give them away to the Muslims,” Batuta wrote.

“Allah and Mohammad could not be accommodated in the Hindu pantheon” quips eminent historiographer B.R. Nanda.

But there were phases of bonhomie too. Emperor Jehangir’s mother was a Hindu. Jehangir’s Hindu wife gave birth to his successor, Shah Jahan. Aurangzeb had a Hindu wife too. The last Mughal ruler, Bahadur Shah Zafar’s mother Lal Bai was a Hindu. Mughal royals like Akbar and Dara Shikoh demonstrated syncretism occasionally. Akbar had set up an establishment at Fatehpur Sikri for translating Indian scriptures.

He got Mahabharata translated into Persian and called it Razmnama (Book of Wars). Dara Shikoh, Aurangzeb’s brother, had the Bhagavad Gita translated into Persian. He composed a study of commonalities in Hinduism and Islam and called it ‘The Mingling of Two Oceans’.

Aurangzeb, though, did not demonstrate any façade of syncretism. His rule was one of the bloodiest chapters in Hindu-Muslim relations. British Orientalist, Stanley Lane-Poole, wrote, “For the first time in their history, the Mughals beheld a rigid Muslim in their emperor – a Muslim as sternly repressible of himself as of his people around him; a king who was prepared to stake his throne for the sake of his faith. He must have been fully conscious of the dangerous path he was pursuing, and well aware against every Hindu sentiment. Yet he chose this course and adhered to this with unbending resolve.”

However, as the Mughal rule declined, rural Muslims started returning to their old Hindu practices. Poor Muslims, especially in provinces like Bengal, were as caste-ridden as their Hindu counterparts. They also used to worship Goddess Kali and participate in Durga Puja. The British Census Report of 1901 noted that the poor and uneducated Muslims used to consult astrologers, look for auspicious days to start work, and prayed to Hindu deities for all sorts of personal problems. Muslim communities in the princely states of Rajasthan like the Meos, who were converted by sword’s edge during Rajput-Mughal wars, used to even celebrate Hindu festivals like Diwali, Dussehra and Janmashtami.

In North India, a new and syncretic Islam, Sufism, also started taking roots. This tradition

accommodated many Hindu practices like tolerance, saint and Dargah worship.

The last Mughal Emperor Bahadur Shah Zafar believed that Hinduism and Islam “share the same essence” and tried to restore Hindu-Muslim concord. He filled his court and army with a large number of Hindus. In his path-breaking work on the Mutiny of 1857, called “The First War of Independence”, V.D. Savarkar wrote in exuberant terms about Zafar’s enthroning in 1837. “So, in the truer sense, we said that the raising of Bahadur Shah to the throne of India was... the declaration that the long-standing war between the Hindu and the Mohammedan had ended, that tyranny had ceased, and that the people of the soil were once more free to choose their own monarch... Let, then, Hindus and Mohammedans send forth their hearty, conscientious, and most loyal homage to this elected or freely accepted Emperor of their native soil on the 11th of May 1857!”

This new-found bonhomie was in ample evidence at the First War of Independence in 1857. The war of 1857 shook the British confidence. They realised that a potential opposition to their rule was building up in the unity of various sections of the Indian society. George William Forrest, a British educator and author of “A History of the Indian Mutiny”, warned the British that the message of the 1857 revolt was that Hindus, Muslims, Brahmins and Shudras could all come together unitedly against the Raj.

Viceroy Canning got a wily idea. “As we must rule over 150 million of people by a handful of Englishmen, let us do it in the manner best calculated to leave them divided and to inspire them with the greatest possible awe of our power and

with the least suspicion of our motives”, he advised his superiors in London. Thus was born the British strategy of ‘*Divide et Impera*’ – Divide and Rule.

Meanwhile, a new revivalist movement, known as Wahhabism, took birth in mid-18th century in Arab lands. Started by a Sunni cleric and theologian, Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab, this puritanical and exclusivist movement became a dominant stream in the Islamic world. Heft was added to it when the new ruler of Arabia, Mohammad bin Saud accorded the status of official religion to it in 1744. Petrodollars added further impetus in the 20th century. From Palestine to Pakistan, this hard-line Wahhabism is leading to the rise of radicalism and fundamentalism among Muslims today.

Wahhabism came to influence Indian Islam also. Al-Wahhab’s contemporary was a Delhi-based Islamic theologian called Shah Waliullah. He saw a big threat to Islam in the growing influence of Hindu customs and beliefs among the Muslims and decided to “purify” Indian Islam. He went to the extent of welcoming the invasion of India by the ruler of Afghanistan, Ahmed Shah Abdali.

Then came the Ahl-e-Hadith movement, started in Bhopal. This puritanical movement was also an attempt at negating the growing Hindu-Muslim proximity. These revisionist and exclusivist movements had finally succeeded in their mission when the Hindus and Muslims, who had fought together in 1857, ended up fighting against each other nine decades later in 1947.

Sir Syed Ahmed Khan, the founder of Aligarh Muslim University, was a classic example of the success of Wahhabi ideology in India.

Sir Syed started off as a strong protagonist of

Hindu-Muslim unity. Addressing a large gathering in Gurdaspur in 1884, he exhorted: “O Hindus and Muslims! Do you belong to a country other than India? Don’t you live on the soil and are you not buried under it or cremated on its ghats? If you live and die on this land, then bear in mind that ‘Hindu’ and ‘Muslim’ is but religious word: all the Hindus, Muslims and Christians who live in this country are one nation”.

But in a few years’ time, the Wahhabists and the British had succeeded in transforming Syed into a rank fundamentalist. “Oh, my brother Muslims! For seven hundred years in India, you had imperial sway. You know what it is to rule. The Bengalis had never at any period held sway over an inch of the Indian soil,” Syed exhorted a few years later. “We do not want to become the subjects of the Hindus instead of the people of the Book (Christians),” he proclaimed.

Syed Ahmed was one of the earliest Muslim leaders to propagate that Muslims were a separate entity. Hector Bolitho, author of “Jinnah – Creator of Pakistan”, described Syed as the first “bold Indian Muslim” to talk about partition.

The next to champion this “Two-Nation Theory” was Mohammad Ali Jinnah. Interestingly, Jinnah too started his political career as a champion of Hindu-Muslim unity. Gopal Krishna Gokhale described Jinnah in 1910 as the “Ambassador of Hindu-Muslim unity”. Jinnah was opposed to partition of Bengal in 1906 and worked for Hindu-Muslim unity until 1916. He told his Muslim citizens that the propaganda about Hindu domination was just “a bogey, put before you by your enemies to frighten you”. But he turned into the champion of Muslim politics by 1936. In just two decades, from

“Hindu-Muslim unity”, Jinnah flipped to “Hindus and Muslims cannot live together”. From a leader decrying separate electorates in 1908, he transformed into a leader championing a separate nation for Muslims three decades later.

The Two-Nation Theory of Jinnah was a fragile and lacklustre one. Intellectually it was hollow and far removed from objective reality. Jinnah’s argument that India’s Muslims had a common identity was a facile one. Muslims lived all across India. They talked different languages and followed different customs, often local and identical to Hindus. That’s why Gandhi repeatedly told Jinnah and Muslims that there couldn’t be any other homeland for them except India.

The fallacy of Two-Nation Theory was established on the day India was partitioned. Just about half of the Muslim population went over to Pakistan, while the rest remained in India, either out of compulsion – they couldn’t afford a migration, or out of choice – they didn’t support partition. In just two decades time, the much-touted Two-Nation Theory returned to haunt Pakistan when the Bengali-speaking Muslims wanted their own homeland and secured Bangladesh in 1971.

In Pakistan’s Constituent Assembly in August 1947, Jinnah tried to please his Western masters by promising to build a secular country where the minorities would enjoy equal rights as the majority. But Pakistan became a quintessential theocracy. Jinnah knew well that there was nothing else that could keep the country together except Islam. To that was added ‘hate India’. The country that Jinnah created out of the Two-Nation Theory can only survive by promoting theocracy and hating India.

Division of India was not just about lands, but

hearts too. Although Hindus and Muslims continued to live together in India after partition, their hearts never met. The Hindu suspicion got fortified over decades due to Muslim intransigence on one hand and appeasement politics on the other. Kashmir to communal riots have fuelled this suspicion further.

Coming together requires that this suspicion ends. It calls for attitudinal change. Unfortunately, large sections of Indian Islam continue to be influenced by Wahhabism. Indian Muslims must reject this exclusivist and hardline version for a more inclusive, liberal and humanitarian Islam championed by institutions like *Nathdlatul Ulema* (NU) in Indonesia. The NU rejects the Saudi-sponsored Wahhabism. It declared that there were “no kafirs”. It called for respect to all religions and dismissed the Islamist propaganda about “Islamophobia” as a figment of imagination, if not the result of their own actions. It theologically held patriotism above Ummah.

For greater national cohesion, Muslims in India should turn to the NU’s approach. They should give up medieval concepts like blasphemy. Murders and murder threats in the name of blasphemy have seriously dented Hindu goodwill for Muslims. Many Hindus today believe that Muslims will not change.

On their part, Hindus too need to understand that perpetual hatred for Muslims cannot be the way forward. They cannot be angry at a stand-up

comedian for insulting Hindu gods, and also demand the right to insult the prophet. Theologies can be contested, but narratives about gods and prophets need to be viewed from a culture-specific lens. Every religion has narratives that others may find illogical.

As *Guruji Golwalkar* in 1948 and *Mohan Bhagwat* in 2018 reiterated, *Hindu Rashtra* doesn’t exclude Muslims. Misplaced argument that Hindus cannot live with Muslims makes *Jinnah* happy in his grave while *Gandhi* and *Golwalkar* will squirm in theirs. There is a global demand that Islam should change. Hindus should demonstrate courage to help Muslims reform. They should handhold those Muslims who are fighting for that.

Continuous reform and upgradation are the unique virtue of Hindus. For Christianity, it took nearly 1,500 years, until *Martin Luther* came forward to challenge the orthodoxy, to reform. Islam is passing through its 15th century. Will a Muslim version of *Luther* surface?

It is an important question for India. Hindus are united and strong today. A serious dilemma haunts them. If the Muslim leadership fails to rise-up to the occasion, can this unity expand to encompass them? Or forced to fight back radical Islamist elements, will it end up creating a Semitic version of Hinduism – intolerant, xenophobic and aggressive?



Religious Harmony: A Unifying Bond

Swami Mitrananda & Ananthakrishnan Seshadri*

Introduction

Harmony – In the context of music, it means “a pleasant musical sound made by different notes being played or sung simultaneously.” In a social context, it usually refers to “a situation in which people are peaceful and agree with each other, or when things seem right or suitable together.” However, an artist regards harmony as a combination of separate but interconnected parts in a way that employs their similarities to bring unity to a painting or any other object of art.

All the above definitions need to be recalled when discussing inter-religious harmony to see the underlying commonalities that bind various religions, primarily the spiritual seeker. In Indian religious traditions, harmony involves experiencing (anubhava) the Divinity that exists in every human being.

Bharat and Religious Traditions

Bharat has been a land of spiritual harmony since ancient times. Religious freedom, acceptance, and harmony are the very substratum of Bharatiya ethos. “Let noble thoughts come to me from all directions,” expresses the Vedas, and this indeed is an inherent nature of Bharatiyas. Sanatana Dharma teaches us to be reverential to life and nature around us.

Bharat has seen its share of a diversity of religions. Sanatana Dharma has allowed various schools/religions to spring from its essence and has accepted and accommodated many faiths. In the well-treaded path, significant turns were taken by many learned masters. New philosophies and practices were propounded by the leaders of these new religions. What reasons compelled them to develop and propagate a new belief system? In India, the reason was neither vanity nor self-seeking behaviour on the part of those who founded these religions, nor was it for practical conveniences. It stemmed from insightful investigations. For example, Nanak Dev, the first guru of the Sikh denomination, equipped his followers with an amalgam of social welfare and spiritual upliftment. In his time, this proved to be an effective method of bringing together many people who adhered to the path of devotion.

The religious and spiritual traditions of Bharat run more profound than mere faith. As noted by many commentators, Bharat’s religious, cultural, and spiritual practices are knowledge-based. Any interfaith dialogue needs to recognise this as it helps to outline, understand and communicate commonalities and differences. People who follow faith-based religions usually define the goal of human life as salvation through faith.

The oldest text of the world, the Rig Veda,

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proclaims, “The Truth is One, the wise express it in a variety of ways.” Sanatana Dharma recognises this maxim and constantly reiterates it through its literature to its society and people. The people of a country can remain united through the worst of times if there is a robust spiritual and cultural foundation.

Spiritual Oneness: The Vision that can lead to Harmony.

Spiritual Oneness of the whole universe is India’s view on life, and Rishis of yore constantly strove to help people understand this idea. The Oneness expands from the individual to family, to society, to the nation, to existence, and to Ishvara. In light of this vision, all that is under our purview and that which lies beyond is Ishvara. This framework is ecologically sound and scientific in nature. We have borne the brunt of its after-effects whenever we have exploited nature.

Agriculture was adversely affected due to the indiscriminate use of pesticides that led to the death of earthworms, and it required a significant movement to impress upon farmers the need for vermicomposting. Research has suggested that wiping out the bee population will lead to humans’ extinction in about four years. Animals, birds, trees, plants, and all other beings are one with us, and nature is but an extension of humans. This is the basis of Sanatana Dharma. Most Indian religious traditions subscribe to this thought.

Those religions—or even some ideologies—that consider humans separate from nature and live with the assumption that nature is merely for the enjoyment of humans must mend their ways. Else, nature will continue to be exploited.

We face many life challenges, so we each need a solid support structure. Family, clans, community, religion, and society serve as this unwavering footing to successfully build our lives. But they are effective only if we can feel the connection with each one of these collectives – that feeling of Oneness. We are interconnected, interrelated, and interdependent. To emphasise this, Swami Vivekananda aptly declared, “One atom in this universe cannot move without dragging the whole world along with it.”

It is essential to record that Vedanta believes there are many paths to the one Truth. Each person on this planet has a unique mind and a distinct way thereof to reach the destination—the Truth. Depending on our individual nature, we need to approach this game of life. The Shiva Mahimna stotra voices: “As different streams having their sources in different places all mingle their water in the sea, O Lord, the different paths which people take through different tendencies, various though they appear, crooked or straight, all lead to Thee.”

Culture – the Injection to Infuse Doses of Oneness

The grand vision of Oneness which emphasises that nothing and no one is separate from us, needs to be imparted not through lectures or posts but rather through shared practices. India has been a land where many such shared practices constantly highlight the unity underlying all diversity. Namaste (namaskar) is how we greet people in this land of Bharat. This seemingly simple greeting has a deeper meaning. We internally recognise the Divinity in another and offer our prostrations to the divine within whom we meet. Worshipping

animals, rivers, trees, inanimate objects, and so on are all age-old cultural practices of the land. Pooja/Upasana, festivals, and rituals are all forms of experiencing this vision of life. The Sanskrit word for festival is “utsava,” meaning “that which elevates.” Every festival is a means of elevating us.

If Truth is One, why is there turmoil in the name of religion? This perhaps is because those religions that come together in brotherhood allow into their exclusive groups only those that belong to their particular sect. Consequently, fissures and turmoil within the society is created. Religious conversion too is a significant problem to religious harmony. Swami Vivekananda, in the final session of the Parliament of the World’s Religions said on 27 September 1893: “The Christian is not to become a Hindu or a Buddhist, nor a Hindu or a Buddhist to become a Christian. But each must assimilate the spirit of the others and yet preserve his individuality and grow according to his own law of growth”. Following such advice would constitute an important step forward to enhancing religious harmony.

An exclusionary religion is a significant threat to religious harmony. In “inter-faith” conferences, there are globally accepted ethical practices on which religions claim to share common ground. The religions profess that they teach their followers to be compassionate to other beings, not to kill, steal, lie, etc. Such universal ethical principles are appreciated by all, including atheists.

When the theological laws and principles of various religions are explored, some of these “common” ethical principles are outweighed and overrun. If the religion teaches a set of laws that justify violating these fundamental moral principles,

then harmony is disturbed. The adherents of that religion kill or convert people of other faiths claiming a religious justification for the same. Now it culminates in a fight between believers and non-believers. And if religious law and religious injunction stand taller than all other laws of acceptable behaviour, then an inter-faith dialogue becomes a non-starter.

Exploring some pathways to harmony

The first step towards arriving at harmony is perhaps acceptance of the belief of others. Meaningful dialogue between different faiths is critical in our journey towards harmony. Interfaith gatherings have transpired for a long time. To ensure that significant progress is achieved in such congregations, it becomes vital to arrive at an agreement on specific concepts, the most necessary of which is to accept that all paths are valid. We have seen earlier how Indian religious traditions revert to the idea of recognising all courses of the land as being valid. Not stopping at merely proclaiming the One Truth, it is backed by various devoutly adhered-to customs that put this concept into practice. Every religious faith should delve into the source of their knowledge and bring out the wisdom of their religion that points to a logical starting point—this elemental acceptance that all paths are valid. A firm commitment by leaders towards this quintessential goal sets a positive foundation for a harmonious society and nation. Acceptance may serve to be more impactful than mere tolerance.

Views from Inter-Faith Conferences

When asked to briefly talk about Judaism and

Torah, Rabbi Hillel said, “What is hurtful or hateful to yourself, do not do to your fellow men.” One of the world’s oldest organised religions, the fundamental principle of Judaism has its core belief in the Unity and Oneness of the universal creator.

Take refuge in the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha, say the Buddhists. In our current context of harmony, it is to rely on a state free from suffering, imbuing positive qualities and being beneficial to others. It is to rely on wisdom as the antidote to suffering. It is to associate with people of knowledge and understanding who are capable of guiding others in their spiritual journey.

Employing all available and impactful mediums of communication, be it social media, movies, books et al., to propagate this message of religious acceptance needs to be sketched as an essential activity for all religions. Today, more than ever, there is an irrefutable need for sensitivity towards our contemporary world. While interpreting the scriptures, there is a need to provide modern analogies. This requires a thorough internalisation of the faith’s core ideas. Many words in today’s context – like heathen, kafir, and mlechas - have acquired many hues for many reasons, including politics and irresponsible media. Religious influencers must ensure that using divisive language is strongly discouraged, which will, in turn, slowly begin to shift the minds of their followers.

Education – the best solution

Only when people in a society are educated about divergent faiths and beliefs can there be a shared understanding amongst them to plan a harmonious way of life. Does that mean the nation should shed its secular credentials and teach religion

and moral values in school? While debates over this idea have been raging for many years, children and adults must understand the divergent faiths and beliefs that make Bharat.

A pressing concern for policymakers is what if the nation-state gets accused of promoting one religion over another. A variation to that concern is the fear of thrusting the nation’s majority religion that may lead to the oppression of minorities. Also, the interpretation of religion by teachers in school and parents at home may differ, and children may get confused with the inconsistency they encounter between what is taught at both ends.

Before addressing these concerns, it becomes essential to bring the focus of education upon the following:

1. Character building
2. Personality development
3. Teach regional languages that hold the culture and traditions of the land. This will also enable us to unlock the treasure chest of literature in regional languages.
4. Preserve nature, culture, and heritage.

There are consequences to not educating our children and adults on these issues. Consider a scenario where a religious minority in the country is unwilling to learn about other faiths. Typically, this has led to the nation conceding for religious or other institutions to be opened to impart spiritual and other forms of education. The child growing up in such a school/institution will not be exposed to other communities’ faiths. In numerical terms, this would mean that a minority percentage (significant or insignificant) of the population grows up in an excluded environment. This leads to them developing a sense of suspicion of people from

other faiths. Having been brought up in such a setup, there is a greater likelihood of them falling prey to aggressive beliefs that may harm members of the rest of society.

A step in the direction of harmonization through educational policy

Education plays a primary role in creating a contemporary, integrated, harmonious India (and the world at large). It is an important step in the direction of harmonisation through educational policy. The new educational policy has tried to address many vital areas required to create a more integrated society. While many key aspects are addressed in the policy, some crucial areas relevant to our topic include:

- Recommendation for exposure to the rich literature in the various Indian languages by great Indian authors ranging from Tagore, Raghavanka to Kamban and Kabir.
- Recommendation for instruction in the local language of the area, learning of other Indian languages, and including a parallel instruction in English from Class 8.
- Recommendation of teaching history from a more native point of view.

Conclusion

Animals, plants, birds, water and celestial bodies, seasons, and even inanimate objects function in perfect synchronicity. In human relationships, we see sorrow and jealousy. To bring about harmony in human relationships, there is a need to develop thoughtfulness and respect between individuals.

As Swami Chinmayananda says, *“To live a life of harmony is to recognise ourselves as members of an interdependent humanity, living in a composite universe. It is to merge our life with the resonant cadence of the whole and to bring about a beautiful melody of harmonious existence... Man has to be delivered from his own misconception of himself. When he develops respect for the Divinity in him, he develops a sense of holiness, and his reverence toward other human beings increases. Then alone can all economic, political, and social disturbances end. Religion or philosophy, whether reached through the church, mosque, or temple, cultivates in man this self-reverence. The seeker is taught to perceive a greater Reality, a greater and more divine Presence in one and all”*.

Om Tat Sat

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Harnessing the Resources of Faith: Drawing on Religion to Build a United India

Nazneen Rowhani*

Religion and the idea of India

As we celebrate the 75th year of India's independence and count our achievements as a nation, we will need to appreciate how astonishing a feat it has been to achieve and preserve the unity of India as a political entity. When in August 1947 British rule over the sub-continent ended, bringing into existence two new nation states, the India that came into existence was a patchwork of territories formerly ruled by the British and 565 princely states ruled by maharajas and nawabs. India could easily have ended up as more than 500 different nations. But it was not just the fragmented political landscape that the leaders had to contend with. This new nation had large populations of people belonging to all the major religions of the world. Its inhabitants spoke more than a thousand languages recorded in over 66 different scripts. Further, this nation which was impoverished by centuries of colonial rule and by injustice had chosen to be a democracy. As a social and political experiment, nothing so bold and ambitious had been attempted in the world before. Not surprisingly, many western observers at the time had predicted that India would not survive as a unified entity. Winston Churchill famously remarked that the moment India passed out of British rule it would "will fall back quite rapidly through the centuries into the barbarism and privations of the Middle Ages."¹

And yet, seven and a half decades later, India stands tall in the family of nations as a young and energetic member that is the world's largest democracy with one of the world's largest, most dynamic and fastest growing economies. Over the decades it has emerged as a world leader in areas such as information technology and pharmaceuticals, it has largely/widely overcome the problems of food shortages and famine, more than halved its absolute poverty rate and made immense progress on a host of development indicators including literacy and health. To be sure, this journey has not been without its share of crises and even today India continues to face issues such as poverty, environmental degradation, corruption in institutions, separatist movements and sectarian violence. Yet, its unity as a federal republic gives it the strength and resources to endure crises with resilience, to learn from its collective experience and to continue to advance as a nation.

While there are many factors contributing to keeping India together as a nation, few can deny that a vital cohesive force that binds the nation together is the spirituality of its people. This spirituality finds expression in a culture that values human beings as the creation of the Divine, is open and accepting of people of all backgrounds, that views in all living beings the reflections of the sacred and therefore enjoins respect, gentleness and non-violence in all relationships as the ideal

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way of life. It is this spirit of an all-embracing oneness that is conveyed in the ancient Indian ethos of *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* (the world is one family). This ethos implicitly envisages that the unity of the nation will be a stage in the process of the progressive manifestation of the spirit of oneness in the social and political realm; it reaches its fruition when the principle of the oneness of humankind is firmly established in the consciousness of people, and when India and its sister nations across the world unite as one family.

This spirituality of the Indian people is not a free-floating, amorphous, superficial condition, but rather a state of being that is rooted in the religious beliefs of its people. India remains a deeply religious nation where its peoples' spiritual convictions have a strong bearing on the way they understand and carry out their civic duties. Thus, living together in peace and unity is viewed not just as an outcome of citizens fulfilling their formal obligations to each other in a social contract - but rather as the expression of the profound spiritual principles that govern interpersonal relationships where the individual finds joy and fulfilment in the well-being of the other. While religion plays a powerful role in India in strengthening the social fabric through its altruistic injunctions, it is a historical fact that from the time of India's independence, religion has also been made into the cause of conflict and social tension in the country. Following the bloodbath that accompanied the Partition which led to the loss of nearly one million lives, religious differences continued to simmer as an undercurrent of unresolved tension erupting time and again in the form of communal violence.

Over the past few decades there has been a

worldwide resurgence of religious fundamentalism. Voices that represent religious extremism and intolerance have increasingly entered the political and social mainstream and, in many countries, they now dominate public discourse. This has created an atmosphere of confusion around the concept of religion where its unifying and constructive role has been steadily obscured by the tendency to view it solely through an identity lens. India too, has not been immune to it and these challenges come at a time of great uncertainty in world history when the need for internal unity is vital to successfully navigate the waves of present and impending crises that can gravely undermine the nation's progress including the COVID-19 pandemic, increasing geopolitical instability and war, economic recession, climate change, terrorism and a global food and energy crisis.

The need of the hour then is for a constructive discourse involving leaders and representatives of all religions in India on the role of religion in contributing to social harmony. The ground for such a discourse must be laid by clarifying the fundamental nature and purpose of religion as a system of knowledge and practice, and the common foundations of all religions. Such a discourse must show a practical path forward for inter-religious collaboration in contributing to the progress of the nation.

The Oneness of Religion

An analysis of the teachings of the major religions of the world and their impact on human society will reveal that they all share a common nature and purpose. The purpose of all religions has been to develop the spiritual potentialities latent

in human nature and through such moral and spiritual development to provide a powerful impetus to the advancement of civilisation. The following quote elaborates on this:

Throughout history, the primary agents of spiritual development have been the great religions. ...A vast literature, to which all religious cultures have contributed, records the experience of transcendence reported by generations of seekers. Down the millennia, the lives of those who responded to intimations of the Divine have inspired breath-taking achievements in music, architecture, and the other arts, endlessly replicating the soul's experience for millions of their fellow believers. No other force in existence has been able to elicit from people comparable qualities of heroism, self-sacrifice and self-discipline. At the social level, the resulting moral principles have repeatedly translated themselves into universal codes of law, regulating and elevating human relationships. Viewed in perspective, the major religions emerge as the primary driving forces of the civilising process.²

While every religion bears the stamp of the particular historical circumstances and cultural setting in which it appeared, the essential spiritual and moral teachings at the core of all religions are one. All religions enjoin upon their followers to develop qualities such as honesty, justice, truthfulness, uprightness, kindness, love and trustworthiness. The Founders of all the major religions exemplified to a superhuman degree perfection in these qualities and set for humanity an abiding example of moral excellence. Although the social teachings, laws and rituals of different religions have differed based on changing historical

needs and circumstances, they ultimately can be seen to serve the same purpose of advancing humanity's collective maturity.

At its heart then, inter-religious harmony is more than a mere expression of interfaith goodwill. Its basis is the oneness of spiritual reality itself to which all religions give expression. As the Universal House of Justice, the supreme governing body of the worldwide Bahá'í community, wrote in a letter to the world's religious leaders:

It is evident that growing numbers of people are coming to realize that the truth underlying all religions is in its essence one. This recognition arises not through a resolution of theological disputes, but as an intuitive awareness born from the ever-widening experience of others and from a dawning acceptance of the oneness of the human family itself. Out of the welter of religious doctrines, rituals and legal codes inherited from vanished worlds, there is emerging a sense that spiritual life, like the oneness manifest in diverse nationalities, races and cultures, constitutes one unbounded reality equally accessible to everyone.³

A discussion on religion's nature and purpose must also address the many harmful attitudes, beliefs and practices that are perpetuated in the name of religion and that have their basis in superstition, blind imitation and prejudice. Such beliefs and practices are not only inherently harmful because they stunt individual and collective progress, they can also gradually grow into a dense thicket of dogma and rituals that chokes the vivifying spirit of religion. When religion gets reduced to such beliefs and practices that are neither morally edifying nor amenable to reason, it is a short step away from turning into a source of

prejudice, hatred and contention. In this context, the Bahá'í writings identify two conditions that true religion must fulfil if it is to be distinguished from superstition, blind imitation and prejudice. The first is that religion must promote unity and serve the social good. To quote the Bahá'í writings:

“Religion should unite all hearts and cause wars and disputes to vanish from the face of the earth, give birth to spirituality, and bring life and light to each heart. If religion becomes a cause of dislike, hatred and division, it were better to be without it, and to withdraw from such a religion would be a truly religious act.”⁴

The second condition is that religion must be in agreement with science and reason. To quote from the Bahá'í writings:

If (religion) does not correspond with scientific principles and the processes of reason, it is superstition. For God has endowed us with faculties by which we may comprehend the realities of things, contemplate reality itself. If religion is opposed to reason and science, faith is impossible; and when faith and confidence in the divine religion are not manifest in the heart, there can be no spiritual attainment.⁵

Communal Harmony as a lived reality

For most of India's masses living in rural and urban areas, inter-religious harmony is a lived reality where people of different religious communities live side by side in friendship forged over generations. It finds expression in a syncretic culture where neighbours belonging to different religions participate in each other's festivals, visit each other's holy places and protect and honour the sacred traditions of each community as a part

of their common heritage. A recent case study of two informal settlements in Indore carried out by the Bahá'í Chair for Studies in Development at Devi Ahilya University illustrates these deep traditions of inter-religious friendship and tolerance. The study which was carried out in North Toda, a predominantly Hindu settlement, and Kabutar Khana, where the majority of the inhabitants were Muslims, explored how residents of these neighbourhoods drew upon their spiritual convictions of the oneness of humankind and their interconnectedness with nature in addressing common challenges related to water scarcity and flooding. In the process, it uncovers a richly-layered culture of fellowship. To quote from the study:

During the festival of Navratri, Muslims join Hindus in the traditional garba folk dance program in the public square. ...During Raksha Bandhan, Hindu and Muslim girls tie (rakhis) on the wrists of their 'brothers' of the other background. On the days of Eid, for example, a steady stream of Muslim visitors from Kabutar Khana could be seen at the local medical shop belonging to a Hindu resident, wishing him on the festive occasion and celebrating together.⁶

The story of these neighbourhoods is the story of countless villages, towns and cities in India. This friendship between people of different religions in neighbourhoods is cemented by the experience of facing common challenges and by sharing in a community's social and economic processes. As a temple custodian and an owner of a small grocery shop in North Toda explained in the study:

The unity between us is a result of us growing up together, side by side. We have become used to one another. We love each other. If we don't

get along with each other, where else are we going to go? If something happens to me at night, I am not going to go looking for a person of my religion to help me. I turn to my neighbour for help—whatever his religion may be.⁷

The study further reflected the many ways residents of different religious backgrounds helped each other in addressing the crisis water shortage or flooding. To quote from the study:

*When it floods, they provide shelter and food for each other and help one another carry their belongings to safety. The well that is located in the Noori Mosque in Kabutar Khana provides water to Hindus and Muslims when the need arises. Similarly, a yogi in Kabutar Khana provides water from his bore well to Muslims in his neighbourhood particularly during the holy month of Ramadan when they are fasting and they need more water at certain times of the day.*⁸

While the participants in the study spoke eloquently of the inter-religious fellowship in their communities, they were also conscious that they could not take this unity for granted. They were conscious of forces in society that sought to divide them along religious lines. The way they countered these challenges was not by distancing themselves from their own religions to arrive at a neutral ‘secular’ space with the other but rather by countering narrow-minded propaganda that promotes divisiveness with a broad-minded reading of their own scriptures where acceptance of the other becomes an element of one’s own faith and serving the other becomes a duty enjoined by the recognition of their common humanity. The following extract from the study featuring voices

of residents in these neighbourhoods captures the way their faith inspires them to overcome barriers and arise to help the other:

A member of a handful of Sikh families who lived in Kabutar Khana, emphasised, “Guru Nanak, our divine teacher, tells us that all humanity is one. There are no real differences between human beings. We have to learn to ignore the worldly differences between people based on caste or creed and serve all human beings.” Participants in this study mentioned that helping people learn to live together harmoniously and with mutual understanding was one of the main aims of religion. ...”The purpose of life,” commented a man from North Toda, “is to do some good to those who are less fortunate than us, to be of some use to them, to be a source of happiness to them... Living for ourselves—this is something anyone can do. But to live for others—that is the key to life.” ...Some Hindu participants in this study highlighted that the ‘dharma’ of a neighbour is to be a source of strength and support during difficulties and a joyful companion during all the happy occasions of life. The implications of this sense of duty towards one’s neighbour was discussed by a shopkeeper in Kabutar Khana: “Even if my neighbour wakes me up in the middle of the night, I will get up and go to help him. Whatever his difficulty may be—whether he has got into trouble with the police or has to be taken to the hospital—it is my duty to support him and help him.”⁹

Religion in the 21st Century

Preserving these traditions of inter-religious fellowship and perpetuating them requires efforts from individuals, communities, religious leaders and

institutions of society such as the media, the education system and the State. However, such efforts can close-in on themselves if inter-religious unity is considered an end in itself and is not viewed in the context of society's needs at this moment in history. Unless united communities are driven by a common objective to contribute to the transformation of society and to ever increasing material and spiritual prosperity, unity can become a pretext for passive conformity with the status quo, with all its attendant challenges and injustices. The most secure basis of inter-religious harmony would thus lie in religious communities coming together to apply spiritual principles common to all religions for building a more united, just and prosperous world.

Addressing the complex and unprecedented challenges of the twenty-first century will require the masses of humanity to make deep changes in their patterns of thought and behaviour and a willingness to make profound sacrifices for the common good. The kind of structural and systemic changes that are needed to become more just, united and to restore our balance with nature will require selfless efforts from the masses of humanity on a scale and for a duration never before witnessed. History bears witness that other than religion no other power or man-made ideology has been capable of stirring the depths of human motivation and calling forth the spirit of nobility, sacrifice and initiative needed to achieve such an objective. The world today is in dire need of the power of religion to once again course through the veins of a beleaguered humanity and to stir a common and collective response to humanity's challenges.

Religious leaders have a unique role to directing the attention of their congregations to the needs of the world. Many heartening examples of religious leaders coming together to rally their congregations around the national drive to address common challenges could be witnessed during the worst phases of the COVID-19 pandemic in India. In one noteworthy example, 25 religious leaders and representatives of interfaith movements in India issued a joint statement to the followers of all religions in India to "reiterate those principles common to all religions that have the greatest bearing on people's response to the crisis."¹⁰

The statement which was issued as an initiative coordinated by the Baha'i community of India, called upon adherents of all religions to unite in a common commitment to four spiritual principles that have the most relevance to this crisis: recognition of the oneness of religion, the oneness of humankind, selfless and sacrificial service to the common good and the complementarity between religion and science. Although this was a modest effort, it illustrated the tremendous potential for positive social change that resided in the untapped spirituality of the masses which faith leaders could come together and channelize for the well-being of all.

Conclusion

In final analysis, it is the objective of religion to enable human consciousness to outgrow the tendency of drawing lines between members of the human family. It implies developing qualities of heart and mind that see the reflections of the divine in all human beings regardless of background and to love all humanity unconditionally. This is in

essence the spirit of *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*. The ancient sages of India who contemplated this vision as an ideal state of collective existence did not live in a globally interconnected world. This generation of Indians, on the other hand, has witnessed the physical interconnectedness of the human family through technological development and therefore can envision humanity as one family. The task ahead for this and coming generations of Indians is to work to translate that vision into a reality in all its fullness by harnessing the immense resources of faith that we all have access to. Let

unity and harmony become our dominant narrative and become associated ever more strongly with the reputation and reality of Indian identity, relegating conflict and contention among the religions to an earlier and less mature stage of our history. Let us harness the edifying power of religion towards constructive endeavours that can bring about the spiritual and material prosperity of our nation. In this way India can truly lead the world morally and contribute to global peace and harmony, assuring its rightful place as a leader in spirituality and inter-religious harmony.

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A Dialogue for Composite Religious Harmony in India: The Road Ahead

Zeenat Shaukat Ali*

“One area where peaceful co-existence has been enormously problematic in the history of humankind is in the relations between world religions. In the past, conflicts generated by religious differences may have been significant and regrettable, but they did not threaten the future of the planet or the survival of humanity.”

His Holiness The Dalai Lama¹

The challenge of religious harmony and peaceful coexistence will define the task of humanity in the 21st century. The recent rise of religious images in conflict around the globe displays its increasing presence in world affairs. Its relevance in the foreseeable future cannot be undermined. The compelling task for humanity in this century is to pursue the path of religious harmony conquering the stresses of confrontation. The emotive power of religion where a single spark can ignite volumes of risky undercurrents are visible. Hence, religious pluralism, reciprocity and dialogue are some of the rational ways of ensuring communal amity by mellowing mutual attitudes of suspicion and trust.

For this, an in-depth analysis of contemporary society's spiritual poverty; the enhancement of the view of religion's embracing role in contemporary society; its ability to present a persuasive, critical appraisal of the modern predicament, particularly in the context of a healthy debate, leading the communities, nations and the world ahead, are vital.

The Indian Context

India, in its seventy-fifth year of Independence

stands tall in the comity of nations as a plural, secular democracy. For centuries it has evoked boundless respect with the tremendous privilege and rare opportunity to be the epicentre of innumerable faith traditions along with unprecedented contact with the world's many cultures. Few countries can boast of such unity in diversity.

For India, championing the idea of religious harmony is not a narrow necessity of electoral politics. Its nationalism is not based on language, geography, ethnicity or religion but a land emerging from an ancient civilisation united by a shared history and sustained by a pluralist democracy.

‘*Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*’ (the whole world is one family),” a Sanskrit phrase found in texts of the Maha Upanishad is a key concept embodying peaceful co-existence, diversity, and secularism within its structure, is engraved in the entrance hall of the Parliament of India.²

The sentiment of religious harmony, likewise originating in the ancient Indian scripture of the Rigveda, admirably displays plurality of religious thought with its mention “*Ekam Sat Vipra Bahudha Vadanti*” (wise people explain the same

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truth in different manners). It also literally means “Truth is one, the wise perceive it differently”.³

Indias’s call for unity and solidarity, regardless of religion, language or ethnicity is the idea of one nation that excludes none and accepts differences. In his historic speech in the Parliament of World Religions, Chicago, in 1893, Swami Vivekananda said; *“If the Parliament of Religions has shown anything to the world, it is this: It has proved to the world that holiness, purity and charity are not the exclusive possessions of any church in the world, and that every system has produced men and women of the most exalted character.”*⁴

Composite Religious Harmony in the Indian Context

Even the most cynical cannot dismiss the essential necessity for religious harmony for a peaceful, progressive India. The idealist perception of a meeting ground of mutual respect enshrined in our Constitution can best serve our democracy. The requisite of moral legitimacy of the burden of peace and harmony therein, obligates a wholesome approach.

In the recent decade, the question of ultra-religious nationalism or creating national identity to the exclusion of religious minorities has stimulated much academic interest and space. It is ironic that Muslims in India must be perceived simultaneously as worthy of emulation and exclusion. Positive stereotypes are often intertwined with negative ones. This paradox of approval and contempt is a typical narration of ideas to serve political narratives.

Further, much deliberation has centred around irreconcilable facets between the Hindu-Muslim identities. For peace to be a continual process, ethnographic studies concentrating on mechanisms to focus on a composite religious harmony must be granted equal space. Dissonance invites adverse repercussions, hampering progress, tilting the scales of harmony, while the amplifying, lightning speed of social media without sanitisation further creates its own nemesis. It must be unequivocally stated that a small band of determined detractors cannot hold the Republic to ransom. The templates for inciting violence, an old conflagration needs to be arrested. The exogenous shock of terrorist attacks, in Paris, India and elsewhere over religious issues still reverberates. Prudence of strategic actors, the efficacy of the state agencies to capitalise in the pursuit of security and harmony is indispensable.

Also, matters of settling scores, regaining turf harnessed in terms of scoring dividends cannot compensate for the resultant fracture in human relations that can consequently spiral out of control. Those who collude in the matter incongruously emphasise on conflict alone. As a Muslim, it is crucial to reiterate that presently Islam, on several fronts, faces an existentialist crisis—there is an ongoing battle for “the soul of Islam”. The recent murder in Udaipur was a demonic act under the facade of religiosity. Intolerant elements have made every attempt to challenge what has been held as unpardonable attempt with no Quranic validation. Consequently, it created its demons. Perceived profanity leads to confrontational approaches.

A Canvas of Religious Tradition in Islam – Brief Outline

Although Islam's norms are encompassed in a composite religiosity, in its large canvas of tradition, over a period of time, a variety of streams of thought emerged during its socio-historical-political expansion. Details of these developments are beyond the endeavour of present thesis. Nonetheless, it suffices to mention that various strands of religious thought emerged, ranging from the cosmic-spiritual-assimilative to the exclusive-orthodox-dogmatic.

While the cosmic, spiritual, assimilative traditions embraced by the Sufis later dwindled in numbers, exclusive and orthodox numerically increased with the formation of the clergy at the political behest. These remain high on impact, exerting a sizeable influential at the end of the spectrum.

Correspondingly, the line between exclusivism and fundamentalism has, over a period of time shrunk, as between fundamentalism and extremism. Further, it is generally held that some Muslim majority countries have, by and large, remained inflexible in the advancement of pluralism and yielded to the exclusion and persecution of their religious minorities. This is glaringly visible in Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Even in India, Kashmir and some districts of Bengal and Kerala have not taken care of minorities or lived up to the espoused secularism. But this issue also encompasses a larger part of the world including secular democratic republics where the plight of minorities, whether in ethnic, black, religion or gender issues is unenviable.

However, the horizons for optimism are

broadening. It must be mentioned that the process of engagement and liberalisation in the Middle East has begun. It is significant that Arab countries and Israel have taken a step towards peace and normalisation of relations. A joint statement between the state of Israel, the United Arab Emirates and the United States of America has been signed in 2020. Subsequently, Bahrain also signed an agreement and Morocco and Jordan followed.⁵ The way forward may be arduous and strenuous; nonetheless the effort is remarkable.

Islam's Interface with India

There is the contentious question regarding Islam's interface with India. Critics claim that the indelible legacy of hostilities, tyranny of rulers, forced conversions, destruction of temples, abduction of women still haunt the world. Indubitably, these were lapses by some Muslims, though not Islamic virtues. Moreover, it needs be also stated that there is in India a history about saints, sufis and scholars who sat in opposition to the conquerors. Thus, even while a section of the nobility was concentrating on consolidation of their powers, citizens, both Hindus and Muslims, philosophers, poets, writers, artists, architects, musicians of both communities were engaged in consolidating the syncretic, harmonious trend. The *Ganga-Jamuna Tehzib* is well known.

Heterogeneity along with adaptability, accommodation and attendant creativity flourished. It was the core characteristic of the socio-cultural-philosophical landscape. The inter-communal fusion is visible in the Bhakti-Sufi Movement of syncretism in the works of Tulsidas, Kabir, Khwaja Moinuddin Chisti, Ramananda, Guru Nanak,

Nizamuddin Auliya, Namadeva, Sri Chaitanya, Farid-ud-din Ganj-i-Shakar, Amir Khusrau and several others. From early times, in the 9th and 10th centuries prior to the advent of conquerors, the works of al Kindi, al Jahiz, ibn Khudadbeh, Yakubi and al Masudi testify to it. Al Beruni, in the early 11th century studied the Indian religion, philosophies, sciences, traditions and culture in his monumental work “Kitab fi tahqiq mafi I-Hind”.⁶ A closer reading of his chapter on religion, might have been the *terra firma* for overcoming theological misunderstandings.⁷

A later manifestation of this was Dara Shikoh’s attempt to identify the convergence of the two faiths discernible in his treatise “The Confluence of the Two Oceans,” where he sought to comprehend the Truth. Another example is a mid-17th century work, Dabistan-e-Mazahib, described by a scholar as the greatest book ever written in India on comparative religion.⁸

Ijtihad (Independent Reasoning)

It is true that the silent majority of Muslims in India are peace loving citizens. Belonging to different ethnic groups, sects, races, caste and creeds, they follow the uniform laws of the land. However, most of them remain under the sway of rigid clerics.

In the age of Islamophobia, the time is ripe for Muslims in India to play a lead role in progressive engagement. It is also time for liberal ascendance to take dominance over conservatives fears. Using coercive tools, imposing a narrow litmus test of “Islamnicness” has raised questions on Islam’s compatibility with a “composite religiosity”. The alternate vision of Islamic understanding of *ihsan*

(to do good things) over enforced adherence to religious mores, is dwarfed.

The revitalisation of the legal device of *Ijtihad*, (independent reasoning) necessitates revival over the doctrine *taqlid* (imitation, conformity to legal precedent) is imperative. To activate the spirit of inquiry is as necessary now as it was in the past. Legislative inquiry is necessary in every age due to the pressures of growing conditions. To limit juristic discussions to a definition of terms or doctrinal differences or hair-splitting dialectics, turning a dictionary into a fortress, is not in consonance with the dynamic spirit of Islam.

The rich heritage archetypes of foundational Islamic thinkers like Ibn Rusd, al-Farabi, al-Mawardi, Ibn Khaldun, Ibn Taymiyyah, Saadi of Shiraz, and several others, especially on social realism and jurisprudence, besides philosophy and political thought, are a requisite for the focal point of edification. Spiritual underpinning in *Wa% dat ul-Wujûd* or the transcendent Unity of all Being, the core concept of Ibn ‘Arabi’s philosophy, is a fundamental doctrine in Sufi Islam.

Further, the philosophy of reform and renewal is a recurrent theme in Islamic intellectual thought; the idea of *tajdid* (renewal) and *Islah* (reform) is not new to Islamic thought. Ibn Taimiyyah, Shah Waliullah, Mohammad Iqbal, Abdullah al Naim, Tariq Ramadhan, Arshad Arslan, Khalid ibn Abul Fazl, have all sought rejuvenation and transformation.

Muslims in India need to provide adequate answers without apologia. To begin with, religious pluralism in the context of Islamic hermeneutics as the cornerstone suggesting diversity or a pluralist order is not resisted by Islam. Nor is truth the

exclusive possession of other many viable religious traditions. Spiritual sacred space is shared and respected. “In truth, God hath sent thee the Book which confirms those that precede it” (Q 2:2); “We have sent Messengers before thee. Of some we have told thee and of some we have not told thee (Q 40:70); “We have sent you in truth, as a Messenger. And there was never a people without a messenger being sent to them (Q 35:24); (Do not revile the gods of others...”(Q 6 :108)

The Medina Charter, the first ever written, displays that Islam rejects the use of enforcement in religion (Q 2:256); (Q 5:32). Violence, brutality and barbarism ignited by terrorist outfits ISIS, Boko Haram, al Qaida, al Shabab, Jaish-e-Mohammad or any such outfits are condemned by Islam. “What the classical jurists of Islam never remotely considered is the kind of unprovoked, unannounced mass slaughter of uninvolved civil populations that we witness regularly. For this, there is no precedent and no authority in Islam”.⁹ Similarly, Timothy Winters writes that the proclamations of bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri “ignore 14 centuries of Muslim scholarship,” and that if they “followed the norms of their religion, they would have had to acknowledge that no school of mainstream Islam allows the targeting of civilians”.¹⁰

The Prophet has stated that, “He who knowingly lends support to tyranny is outside the pale of Islam (Tabarani). He further stated “The worst form of class prejudice is to support one’s community even in tyranny.” (Baihaqi). Violence and terrorism find no sanction in religion, morality or international law. Such acts are in total contradiction to Islam’s reverence for peace, explicit recognition of tolerance, compassion, social

equality, high moral order and spiritual depth.

Unfortunately, in India, perceived hurt Muslim sentiments ensuing in the shedding of blood in the name of religion (*sar tan se juda*), to proselytisation of violence in the name of the Prophet by a small minority of Muslims are extinguishing the original spirit of Islam. Muslims worldwide agonise, when religious leaders and laity remain silent after there is violence in the name of the Prophet whose mission was to establish peace in a nation where ferocity was the order of the day. Internalising puritanicalism, turning it into a point of mistaking it for a universal truth, is negating the basic tenet of peace in Islam.

This is call to the Muslim leaders, Imams, the madrassas and parents in particular, to deradicalise youth, instructing children that such acts are not only detested and abhorred by Islam but are in total contradiction to Islam’s reverence for peace, explicit recognition of tolerance, compassion, social equality, high moral order and spiritual depth.

Islamic organisations in India, have openly condemned the act of beheading while organisations in Pakistan, have not. Vigilance from the dangerous radicalisation of young minds is a priority as is modernising *madrassa* education by inclusion of the largest range of secular subjects to equip students to broaden horizons and compete in a wider world and education of Imams to deliver *Khutbas (sermons)* on a wide range of subjects like peaceful coexistence. Muslim intelligentsia must engage in releasing fresh energy to occupy a vantage point in the public domain.

In this connection, it is imperative to recollect that although Muslims, including from almost all of the Arab world, were severely critical and enraged

of Salman Rushdie's *Satanic Verses* as it was apprehended as a methodical effort to inflame Muslim sentiments, they ignored Imam Khomeini's fatwa to execute Rushdie. The Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) restricted itself to call upon member states to ban the book.

Most Prophets in their life time were ridiculed, mocked and threatened. The Quran said to them "Be patient over what they say and leave them graciously" (73:10). The Prophet himself never lowered his dignity when confronted with defamatory remarks or physical attack. Instead, he kindly and patiently went on with his spiritual soul-searching and message of peace. Arguments of the Prophet conducting himself with dignity even though defamed, ridiculed, humiliated and even attacked are ignored.

Misconceptions and contextamories (quoting out of context) on the subject of apostasy, blasphemy, jihad, kafir— are the general categories of words where misunderstandings abound. Islam does not permit taking the life of a person on the score of religion, "anyone slew a person unless it be for murder or for spreading mischief in the land it would be as if he slew the whole people: and if anyone saved a life it would be as if he saved the life of the whole people" (5:32).

It is important to note that favourable trends to move away from rigidity are fast emerging in the Muslim world. It is heartening that the Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), the Indonesian Muslim political party and world's largest moderate Muslim movement, has made a noteworthy breakthrough with Islamic conservatism in an unprecedented decision to abolish the legal category of "infidel" (*kafir*

meaning one who hides the truth) for non-Muslims. *Kafir* has become a very derogatory term for non-Muslims. Human dignity is not negotiable.¹¹

Similarly, numerous Muslims diagonally across the globe currently question the conventional perceptions regarding violence on blasphemy, apostasy. A self-proclaimed clergy "a moral thought police" is not omniscient and Muslims feel the rulings or "fatwas" delivered by them are contextual. Recently, in a pioneering interview with "Al-Arabiya", the distinguished Saudi Crown Prince, Mohammad bin Salman, initiated a ground-breaking suggestion on concentrating the Constitution and laws on the Koran, eliminating many hadiths (sayings of the Prophet) that are not *mutawatir* (well known). He speaks of the need for a current "interpretation" of the Koran.¹²

Political Moderation

Currently, rhetoric is a powerful weapon in conflict situations. Hate, particularly with relation to religion has taken dangerous dimensions. While safeguarding freedom of speech, challenging hate through adjudication would be a deterrent. Hatred is 'a threat to everyone,' declared Guterres, calling for global effort to end xenophobia and 'loathsome rhetoric'. "A disturbing groundswell of hate-based violence and intolerance aimed at worshippers across all faiths, must be countered soon before it's too late," he said.¹³

Presently, political moderation, a composite religious dialogue for peaceful co-existence is a seminal factor. Allegedly, determining the definition to legitimise citizenry; supremacist approaches, reinventing the convulsions of partition, questioning Muslim patriotism, considering them a breeding and

a threat to national security have been disturbing issues. On the other hand, the fringe Muslim belligerency, hard-line urgings instead of reasoned argument, intolerance spilling in collision with other ideologies especially when it comes to religiosity, scornful of their traditions attacking the *Hindutva* movement, not mentioning thirteen centuries of Islamic fundamentalism or oppression, disrespecting the National flag, has drawn equal angst.

Educational levels yet remain below the national level. Although the graph of women's education is rising, yet the pace of slow social reforms also results in slow movement and workforce participation. Presently, while autonomous correctives remain a single facet of the matter, communication with the mainstream community is another matter necessitating a forthright dialogue and a cautious calibration as equal citizens. The failure to communicate with the larger community in adequate measure has inclined to limit the boundaries of diversity that are a benchmark of Indian society.

The moorings and ideology of Muslims reflect an inclusive composite society with no room for the practice of violence or intolerance; "All creatures form the family of God and he is best loved of God who loves his creatures" (Baihaqui: Kitab ul Iman). *Hubbul watan Minal Iman* "love for one's nation is a part of faith" (Sakhawi). As the Holy Qur'an states, "And break not the oaths after making them firm" (16:92).

Conclusion - India as Homeland – The Road Ahead

India is the cherished homeland—a rhapsody of serenity, peace and security, with a limitless

horizon for all Indians where the idea of the "other" is not conceptualised. The task currently is to tutor the outlook on xenophobia, a circumscribed nationalism and a proscriptive democracy. The remarkable enrichment of the heritage of India's inimitable reciprocity, accommodation and dialogue are rational ways of ensuing communal amity. The values of a composite religious harmony, synchronisation, congruence was not gifted to India. On the contrary they have been ingrained in India's composite culture.

On December 13, 1946, the Constituent Assembly, when outlining the objectives of the Constitution that later grew into the Preamble, assured the people of the core democratic values of Justice, Liberty and Equality. Fraternity was added as a core value by Babasaheb Ambedkar on February 21, 1948. The preambular values are unexceptionable. Promotion of Fraternity is the pillar in strengthening unity, integrity and social ties assuring that the dignity of the individual citizen is non-negotiable. This fundamental duty is defined in Article 51A(e).

Leaders of the Indian Independence movement—Mahatma Gandhi, Vallabhbhai Patel, Jawaharlal Nehru, Maulana Azad, and numerous others from both communities, adhered to the notion of composite nationalism and communal harmony. Muslims in India must be part of the process of India's advancement as a global power and not mere spectators or beneficiaries. In the past and present they have produced some distinguished social reformers, scientists, educationalists, attorneys, artists nurturing India's splendid progression. Sir Syed Ahmed Khan, Begum Aijaz Rasul, Abadi Babo Begum, Bi Amma,

Begum Hasrat Mahal, Maulana Mumtaz Ali Khan, Maulvi Chirag Ali, Justice Ameer Ali, Saif Tyabji, Dr Zakir Hussain, Dr. APJ Abul Kalam, Salim Ali, Azim Premji, Ustad Vilyat Khan and many others have contributed to India's magnificence and accomplishment.

Currently, centrality of civil society to enable a composite religious dialogue conceptualised in interpersonal relationship as a process of dynamic engagement and function is quintessential. Silence is not an option. Emerging trends imbued with greater realism can discard inherited ideological inertia to realise greater possibilities.

A leap of faith moving towards an aspirational civilisation, intersecting, firming the thread for a religious dialogue would be motivating. A civil society outreach strategy could focus on the

promotion of a composite religious dialogue, strengthening national integration, fostering diversity through collaborate action programs and greater inter-faith interchange with religious leaders. Cultural and social organisations representing key sections of society could open fresh vistas for alliances. The requisite conversation among the people of India solicits commencement. As the venerable Buddha said, it is time to turn the poison into medicine.

"Chaman mein ikhtelate rango buh se baat banti hain,

Hum hi hum to kya hum hain, Tumhi tum ho to kya tum ho"

Sarshar Sailani

(In the garden there an integration of colour and aroma, togetherness is when we integrate)

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Religious Pluralism, Secularism and Uniform Civil Code

S. R. Bhatt*

After abolition of the pernicious practice of 'Instant Triple Talaq,' it is time to focus attention to the introduction of a Uniform Civil Code across the country. In India, the issue of uniform civil code is oft debated in the context of prevailing religious pluralism and secularism, but is there a logical correlation amongst these three. Secularism, in the sense of respect for all religions, is a logical corollary of religious pluralism. It is a socio-political approach to religious pluralism. Now the question is whether the need for uniform civil code is also not socio-political and why it should not be shorn of all religious considerations. Based on the distinction between the sacred and the temporal can we not confine it to temporal sphere only and do not allow religious consideration to overshadow it? Do national unity and social solidarity not demand uniform civil code? Religion is a matter of personal belief but uniform civil code is an interpersonal matter. Should the two not be separated? These and such other concerns need to be discussed in the contemporary debate.

Secularism and Uniform Civil Code

Secularism and uniform legal code are the hallmarks and requirements of a civilised and developed society. Though initially religion evolved as a human response to the 'transcendental', it has come to involve both the sacred and non-sacred

life of human being. But in an ideal situation, role of religion should be restricted only to the sacred. The immanent worldly life is distinct though not separate from the religious life. The nature, mode of living and goal of the two are different; in a pluralistic society they must neither be mixed nor conflated. An absence of this requirement results in complicated problems which need to be thrashed out for integrated and peaceful living. A meaningful solution to these problems, which is agreeable to all concerned, requires conceptual clarity and logical analysis of the issues involved so as to draw out their clear-cut distinctions and interrelations. This is particularly so in case of a uniform legal code to regulate the mundane life of all citizens of a country. This is not a matter of feeling or sentiment but of understanding the realities of life in a given situation. It is not an imposition of some pattern of living on an unwilling section of the society but a rational acceptance of the need and utility of uniformity of laws in some spheres of life.

The problems involved here are essentially sociological but they acquire religious and political overtones by viewing them in the background of religion and politics. They pertain to the way of life of a particular society which is religiously pluralistic and in which different sections follow different sets of beliefs and practices traditionally

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handed down and *claimed* to be sanctioned by religion. But the problems are not at all religious and religion has nothing to do with civil life in a secular set up. In a theocratic society, civil life is bound with and is governed by a particular religion but that is not the case with a secular society. Whatever be the meaning of secularism, be it state's indifference to all religions or equi-distance to all religions or equal regard for all religions (and here again a distinction can be drawn between *Sarva Dharma Samabhava* and *Sarva Dharma Sadbhava*¹ the spheres of religious life and civil life need to be clearly demarcated. The human life is an organic whole and therefore, one sphere of life cannot be separated from another, but this does not mean that they cannot be distinguished and treated separately and differently. It is just like an organism consisting of multiple organs that are inseparable in a holistic and integral living but each organ can be looked at separately physiologically and treated separately medically for cure of ailments. The concepts of 'separability' and 'distinguishability' follow different sets of logic and they need not be confused in a scientific thinking.

These problems get further complicated when a distinction is drawn between majority and minority sections of a community on religious grounds. In fact, in a secular set up, such a distinction is illogical and irrational since the very connotation of the term 'secular' is antithetical to such a distinction. But in practical life we often care little for logic and reason, particularly when vested interests get entrenched. In a democracy, where people are less educated and where vote-bank politics is rampant, these problems take political colouring. Purely

sociological problems are posed as deeply religious. In a society where no distinction is drawn between religious education and education about religion, the so-called protectors of religion acquire an upper hand to exploit religiosity of the masses and lead them to believe that these problems are intimately related with their religious life. The political leaders take shelter of these 'protectors of religion' for their own political mileage. It must be made clear that no satisfactory solution can be arrived at if these problems are approached from the ill-founded religious or political considerations because these are not only irrelevant but they bring in extraneous considerations also. If these considerations are allowed to play their nefarious role, they will not only cloud the real issues but will also generate ill will among the sections of the society, endangering peace and harmony.

Need for a Uniform Civil Code

A true religion is never dogmatic and obscurantist and it cannot be so, but some so-called protagonists of a religion are so and therefore they will never permit solution or dissolution of any such problems, since there lingering on is helpful to their self-aggrandisement. Inter-faith dialogues and means like this are of no avail firstly because these problems are not genuinely religious and secondly because those who get involved in these may not have an open and positive mind. A political approach is also bound to fail because the party in power and the party or parties aspiring to come to power have to care for the support of the concerned sections to get votes. It is not helpful to resort to referendum to ascertain the views of different sections because there will be no

unanimity. It is misleading to talk of mass approval or disapproval through referendum to ascertain the views of different sections because such a process is generally vitiated by the opinion of a handful of vocal people who may influence the minds of the masses. It may happen that the masses care little to express themselves or they may be incapable of doing so because of lack of knowledge and true information and they may be carried away by a few influential people who may claim to be their leaders. These handful people, quantitatively very insignificant, pose to be elite and their views are passed on as majority opinion. To be influential is one thing and to be scientific is an altogether different thing. Only a scientific mind can have dispassionate and objective temper and may approach issues logically without taking sides. Through proper education, that solution can be made known and disseminated among the concerned people. Of course, what is stated above is theoretical and its actual implementation is not easy, but it is not impracticable either. Given a will, there can be a way.

Against this background we have to view the problem of Uniform Civil Code in the democratic and secular Republic of India. The problem has been lingering on since independence. The judiciary has voiced concern about it. It has pointed out anomalies in the provisions of our Constitution, which the Indian Parliament has to rectify. Indian lawmakers cannot escape their duty on the specious grounds that the Supreme Court has only given a suggestion or advice and not a 'directive'. The argument also cannot be used that pending amicable agreement, any such enactment may lead to more fragmentations. These are all excuses

which vested interests will put forth to further their own agenda. If the Constitution can be amended by inserting the notion of 'Secularism' why should its necessary corollary of 'Uniform Civil Code' be not incorporated? Simply put, if the demand has come from one section of the community and is opposed by another section, this does not diminish the need and desirability of Uniform Civil Code.

The issue of Uniform Civil Code has to be approached scientifically and in a broader national perspective, but unfortunately, we have not done so. We have not only failed to discern that it is a sociological problem and not religious or political, we have also failed to make a subtle but very vital distinction between change in 'Muslim Personal Law' and enacting a 'Uniform Civil Code'. Logically, these two are not the same. A sociological issue has to be viewed taking it out from its religious, rather sectarian, and political confinements. If this is done, not only will the controversy wither away, there will also be dissolution of the problem. It has to be understood that the scope and canvas of Uniform Civil Code is much wider than the scope and canvas of Muslim Personal Law.

The Muslim Personal Law has been taken up for consideration here because the need for Uniform Civil Code has primarily and initially arisen in the context of the Muslim section of Indian community and the support and opposition to it has come from some vocal elements of the community. But it will hold good for other sections also. The advice of the Supreme Court first came in famous Shah Bano case. But this should not be misunderstood as isolating and singling out Muslim section of our community. One can as well take

the example of any other section. This point needs to be emphasised because otherwise there is a danger of its being misunderstood as anti-Muslim.

Islam is a religion adhered to in India and outside. “Muslims in India” is a sociological entity. Some enlightened Muslims have realised and appreciated this distinction. Islam is the same all over, whether practiced in India or elsewhere, but “Muslims in India” does not mean ‘Muslims outside India’. The two are not to be equated. The expression ‘Indian Muslim’ is meaningfully and legitimately used to distinguish Muslims outside India and this is acceptable to all. We can profitably make use of this distinction in approaching this problem. Anything concerning Islam is religious but anything concerning ‘Indian Muslim’ is not necessarily so. Indian Muslims do have facets other than religious. It has been unfortunate that we have very often overlooked this distinction. The same thing has happened with Urdu language which is identified with Muslims though it has been a language or mother tongue of many non-Muslims as well.

Change in Muslim Personal Law and enactment of Uniform Civil Code are not one and the same because there can be change in the former without affecting the latter though not vice versa. Muslim Personal Law touches only one section of the Indian community whereas enacting Uniform Civil Code affects all sections of society. There are many sections and sub-sections in Indian community based on religion or sectarian tenets. Had there been only two sections, say Hindu and Muslim, even then, the two phrases would not have been synonymous because uniformity would have demanded transcendence from both the sections

as no Code of anyone could be regarded as standard. The reality is that we have a multiplicity of social groups not based on religion alone and one has to take cognisance of all of them. Since it is a social issue, social groups and not religious groups should be the basis of our consideration.

When some Muslim men and women asked for a change in Muslim Personal Law they had limited objective of bettering the lot of Muslim women. The need for Uniform Civil Code has altogether different considerations. It cannot be argued that even though desirable it is not possible because the Muslim Personal law is based on ‘Shariyata’ which incorporates divine injunctions unchangeable by human beings. Firstly, this argument is irrelevant because it obliterates the distinction between the sacred and the secular. Secondly it is untenable because it is based on the confusion between changing the ‘Shariyata’ and changing an inadequate interpretation of ‘Shariyata’. Change in Muslim Personal Law only calls for change in an inadequate interpretation of ‘Shariyata’. The traditional interpretation is inadequate and outdated. Many Islamic countries have modified it though some retrograde minds have strived for its ‘Talibanisation’. The progressive minds do not approve this Talibanisation. This apart, every divine injunction is meant for human beings and it is to be interpreted by a human being. This is done in accordance with an individual’s noetic or intellectual capacity. Corresponding to the advancement in knowledge, there is also a change in the noetic capacity of the human being that calls for a change in the interpretation. History of humankind has witnessed such a change from time to time as also resistance

to such change. This is the law of nature. If, with the advancement in knowledge, no change is instituted in the interpretation, there will be no correspondence between knowledge and reality, theory and practice and this will surely retard the growth of society. The backwardness of Muslim women is a testimony to this. Let it be made clear that whatever is stated about Muslim women is equally applicable to some other sections of the Indian community.

Even if it is argued that a change in Muslim Personal Law involves a change in the 'Shariyata' there should be no objection to it if the change is desirable. In this world, God has permitted change. Change is the law of life. It is the basis of cosmic development. Evolutionary thinkers like Darwin have argued that if we do not keep pace with change, in the absence of adjustment with the environment we shall not survive in the struggle for existence and the consequence will be total extinction. Whether Darwinianism is true or not, the point relevant to our analysis is that good change is not something derogatory or condemnable or uncalled for and even God is not averse to it because He has created a changing universe. If it is so, why to create unnecessary fuss about unchangeability of divine injunctions. Further, every law is enacted in accordance with the needs of the time, place and circumstances and a change in them calls for and admits a change in the law. The 'Shariyata' is based on the circumstances prevalent in the Arab world centuries before. Now the circumstances have radically changed and therefore, there is no justification for its continuous rigid adherence. Any resistance to it is sheer obscurantism.

Confusing the change in Muslim Law with Uniform Civil Code, it has been argued that this will result in losing of identity by the Muslims in India. It is a bad argument. It should be asked whether continuance of this harmful and outdated law is the only means or the real means of to preserve identity. This smells of narrow-minded sectarian approach. If we approach it as Indians, all such talk will appear meaningless. If we consider national unity and solidarity as desirable ideals, and there can be no two opinions about this, then also it demands a uniform pattern of social and lawful behaviour for the whole nation. Uniform code of social behaviour is not the only means of national unity and solidarity but surely it is one of the most important and essential means.

Religion is primarily a personal matter though it does have social dimension. But in a civilised and advanced society, it should not be allowed to cloud social concerns. There should be meaningful separation between the two. This is particularly so in a secular state. Law has to distance itself from religion.

The need for Uniform Civil Code has a humanitarian aspect as well. There is no denying of the fact that the place and position of women in our society is far from satisfactory, if not pitiable. On the one hand we put forth equality, liberty, fraternity and all other egalitarian ideals as the objective of our social existence, on the other hand we have been continuing with unjust practices, maltreatment and deprivation of women. The preamble of our Constitution enshrines these cherished ideals but they should not remain merely decorative.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it must be reiterated that whatever is said about the Muslim Law holds good about Hindu, Christian, Parsi and other sections and groups in India as well. There are many harmful

customs of the tribal communities which need to be brought within this purview. For this enterprise, though noble and desirable, mutual trust is needed and this can be cultivated by proper education which is the sole remedy of our country's ills and evils.

References:

- 1 *Sarva Dharma Samabhava is often translated as "All religions are the same" or "All path's lead to the same destination (In a religious sense)", although its literal meaning is closer to "All dharma/faiths are possible". The term 'Sarva Dharma Samabhava' means literally equal respect for all religions.*



Agenda for Unity: An Interview with Shri Krishna Gopal, Sah-Sarkaryawah, Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh (RSS)*

Swadesh Singh*

Swadesh Singh: Despite suffering repeated invasions for more than a thousand years, and also suffering the brunt of partition, India has still retained its essential core unity and its civilisational heritage. What factors do you think have contributed to this outcome?

Krishna Gopal: When we look into the Indian history, despite the fact that there were numerous states which were ruled by different kings, yet the idea that each kingdom was a part of a larger Bharat was deeply ingrained in the consciousness of the rulers as well as the people. That is why India has remained united. It is an ideological, cultural and philosophical construct, which for thousands of years encompassed the land mass stretching from the Himalayas in the North to Kanya Kumari in the South and from the coastal areas of Gujarat and Pakistan in the West, to Parshuram Kund in Arunachal Pradesh in the East. This is a fundamental unity that goes far beyond political unity. That is why over 560 princely states merged with India, when Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel exhorted them to do so.

Swadesh Singh: In the above context, to promote unity, when slogans such as “Hindu-Muslim-Sikh-Christian are all brothers,” were propagated, was it done because there was an

assumption that there was difference within which needed to be bridged?

Krishna Gopal: Linguistic and geographic diversity is visible to anyone who travels across the country. The food, the festivals, the very colours of India change as we travel. But these are outward differences; internally, there is a common and similar fundamental philosophy of oneness. Despite differences in language, each language, in its core, propounds the same fundamental philosophy. The values of life, be it in the sense of devotion, reverence for the earth, the concept of karma, birth and rebirth, Nirvana, the idea of salvation etc., all find resonance, whether spoken in Bengali, Oriya, or any other Indian language. This is because there is a unity of philosophy, which is propounded by all languages. The slogans you mentioned were brought in later. They are political slogans.

Swadesh Singh: How is this fundamental unity you speak of to be understood and brought to the masses in the context of present-day society?

Krishna Gopal: The fundamental unity is already existing. We simply have to look beneath the diversity that we see all around us. If people from Assam and West Bengal go to North India, they will observe the same devotion to Krishna as

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is practised by them. In Kerala, the language is Malayalam, but the poetry of devotion is the same. The plays and articles that have been written by the poets and writers of Assam and Bengal convey the same sentiment. This is the fundamental unity. We need people to travel more, study more and look beneath the superficiality. You see the similarity in the works of Thiruvalluvar in Tamil Nadu and of Guru Nanak Dev ji in Punjab. This is the fundamental unity.

Swadesh Singh: Over the centuries, we have had great seers who have propagated this spirit and unity of India such as the great scholar poet Sankaradev of Assam in the 15th century and Adi Shankara of Kerala who established the Shradapeeth in the eighth century. In the sixteenth century we had Raskhan, a Muslim who became a Krishna devotee as also Tajbib, which showed an intermingling and an assimilation of culture. India was a great melting pot of culture, so why did the country have to bear the trauma of partition? What happened to that fundamental unity?

Krishna Gopal: When the invasion of Islam took place about 1000 years ago, it came to spread a particular ideology. The inhabitants of this land had never experienced in life a situation that the invaders after winning, to spread their ideology, would attack our original religion, destroy our temples, our ideology and our places of worship. However, despite the fact that India's intellectual class was under the rule of Islam for seven to eight hundred years, even under the rule of Islam, they fought a long struggle to keep their ideas and their society safe. And they succeeded. In other parts of the world, subjected to Islamic conquest,

the local population was subdued and consumed by the invading ideology. But India was the only exception. So, the first thing that has to be recognised is that the people of India fought continuously to save their religion, culture, thoughts and their society. But when the Britishers came, over a period of two hundred years, they cleverly attacked this fundamental unity of India. The cultural unity of India could not be broken by Islamic invasions because the basis of this unity was not political. Hindus were not kings, but pilgrimages continued. Hindus did not have an army and their temples were broken, but the people had the Bhagwad Gita and the Ramayana, and their faith could not be broken. So, the British created rifts within communities, which led to deep divisions and eventually to partition.

Swadesh Singh: Today, the need is about promoting communal harmony and unity within communities, which really means talking about Hindu-Muslim unity. If we consider the two communities to be separate, then will not unity also be very superficial, or are we looking at unity at the political level only?

Krishna Gopal: The *Sanatan* society that has been living in India has a big basis for its unity. There are hundreds of sects in India, of different types and having different rituals, worship practises and traditions, and yet everyone is united. The basis of this unity must first be understood. Its basis is that in the eternal thought of India, we have accepted some things which are all embracing such as the thought behind the words, '*Sarve Bhavantu Sukhinah*'. It is a prayer for happiness, not just for people who believe in our idea, but for all the

people of the world, regardless of their belief system. This philosophy thus also seeks happiness for the people of Pakistan and China and all other parts of the globe. It is a philosophy for universal good. There is thus a pervasive unity in *Sarve Bhavantu Sukhinah*. We have to understand this. Secondly, India's *Sanatan Samaj* has accepted another principle for thousands of years, from Vedic tradition till today. The underlying principle with this thought is that there will be people who say something other than what we believe, there will be people who believe in another idea. So, a theory was established from the tradition of Rigveda that the believers of a second idea can be nice people too. When the Vedic sage said *Ekam Sadvipra Bahudha Vadanti*, he gave a certificate of approval to an alternate viewpoint. Any idea, said the sage, can be good. It must not be rejected outright. This then is the mantra to unite infinite diversity—in other words, this is unity in diversity. Hence, we have two basic principles: One, a comprehensive imagination of happiness for all, and two, to have a big mind to accept any idea with respect. This is essentially the formula for harmony and unity which overcomes the diversity of languages, dialects, climate, food, clothing and ideologies.

Swadesh Singh: You have done a lot of work on Dara Shikoh as also on a number of Muslim saints who were trying to understand Indian philosophy and thought. But let us talk of the last two hundred years before independence where we see the emergence of a new kind of politics by the British. In 1905, the British government partitioned Bengal on the basis of religion and in

1906, the Muslim League was formed. In 1909, the Muslims were given a separate electorate, which paved the way for them to claim a separate identity and nationality. Now, all these people were also part of the Indian cultural tradition, and in the villages, they followed the customs and traditions of the other communities. Thereafter, it took just a few decades before the country was partitioned. Today, these issues keep cropping up and talks of majority and minority have separated the communities. How do we deal with this issue?

Krishna Gopal: The British understood one thing and that was that their reign would end quickly if India remained united. Thus started British attempts to create a cleavage between Hindus and Muslims. During the Muslim invasions, a lot of cross-cultural confluence had taken place in many spheres. Muslims got engrossed in Indian music, Muslim Qawwalis became popular, Muslims started worshipping the tombs, we see the emergence of the Tajiya procession and the like. We also see many Muslims translating Hindu sacred texts to Persian and Arabic. This continued for five to six hundred years. Britain realised that to continue ruling the country, it was essential to break this unity. Thus started the attempts to isolate the Muslim society and set it apart by giving various kinds of inducements. The Muslim League was formed by the British as was the conspiracy to divide Bengal into Muslim Bengal and Hindu Bengal. Gradually, the Muslim community in India distanced itself from its roots and the draft of the partition of the country was prepared. But with the partition of the country, the problem remained unsolved as a large number of Muslims remained

in India. Earlier, Jinnah would say, how can minority Muslims be safe in a majority Hindu state. That fear still remains. So, to bring unity, it has to be done by a change of mind and heart and feelings. This is what needs to be fixed.

Swadesh Singh: Articles 25 to 30 of India's Constitution guarantees that the rights of minorities will be protected. However, politics that developed in India over the last 75 years has veered from protecting the rights of minorities to the appeasement of minorities. Has this disrupted Indian unity?

Krishna Gopal: With independence, every citizen got the right to vote and the vote became an object of great value. Some political parties then started looking into collecting bulk votes and created new terminology to get such votes. One such terminology was the word minority. This word is a foreign construct, which came from Europe. It meant a small group that is not from that country, having migrated from somewhere, for some reason. It referred to a people who did not belong to that country or that race. But in India, Muslim society was a big society. Post-independence, it was about 12 to 13 percent of Indian society. On that basis alone, they should not have been referred to as a minority. Most of these Muslims were converts from here. How could they be called minorities, simply because they changed their religion? But once formed into a block to get their votes, they were given something or the other to ensure that they always remained separate. What should have ended with the British departure unfortunately did not happen, because the majority-

minority concept was created. We are facing the consequences now.

Swadesh Singh: How much effort is required now to see that assimilation takes place?

Krishna Gopal: The Indian state gives citizenship, which confers all the rights to an individual as given in the Constitution. But to be a national you have to change your mindset. Citizenship gives you certain rights constitutionally. Nationality determines your duties. As soon as you become a national, you feel connected with the nation through the tradition of thousands of years. So, you feel the happiness and sorrow of the nation as yours. You feel the history and geography of the nation as yours. Nationality hence should be equal for all. The feelings of happiness and sorrow of the nation, the feelings of those who are enemies and friends for the nation are the same. All citizens must share this nationalist sentiment. As an example, our former President, Dr Abdul Kalam, who was a great scientist, developed various missiles for India. He named them Akash, Nag, Trishul, etc. These names are symbols of the nationalist sentiment. Our Muslim brothers and sisters must associate themselves with the history of the country and not with the history of the invaders who destroyed the temples, tormented the people, levied the jizya tax and caused great pain and suffering. If they associate themselves with the invaders, then how will they be called national?

Swadesh Singh: The debate on communal harmony for the last 75 years in India, that is, has centred on secularism. Hindu society by its very

nature is secular. But the practise of secularism has not been uniform, both within the polity as well as within certain communities. The Honourable Prime Minister in his Independence Day address spoke about a 'nectar period', where India has to move forward for the next 25 years. We imagine a prosperous Bharat - a 'Samarth' Bharat. How should we now debate the idea of communal harmony? What should be its form? And how should society take it forward?

Krishna Gopal: There are two things which need to be discussed. The first is providing financial and other assistance to minorities. It is done in the name of their welfare, but the results can never be good. For example, we give scholarships to the children of minority communities to study. It is okay, as it is given to poor children. But suppose, in a class of 40 children, there are five children from the minority communities who are poor and are being given a scholarship. But there are 10 other children in that class who are also poor, but they are not given a scholarship because they do not belong to the minority community. This creates discord, because in the minds of those ten children, the question arises: Why have we not been given help, when the condition of our house is even worse than theirs? Such one-sided assistance only creates greater differences in society instead of harmony. So, financial and other assistance must be uniformly given to all, rather than on a segregation basis. The recent example of the government providing toilets and cooking gas to all poor households regardless of their religion is the way forward. Help should be given to those who need it. If there is greater poverty in the minority community, then

automatically they will get more. Banks should be opened where there is a need for a bank. Training should be given to those artisans who need them. This country is ours—we should not divide it in the name of minority-majority as has happened thus far. We need to look at all citizens with the same eye and not from a religious viewpoint. This was so stated in the Constituent Assembly but this could not happen. The people who were in the Constituent Assembly, the people who were our architects of the Constitution, had this vision. We need to realise this vision, which can be done by looking at the whole of society as one. To end poverty, we have to look at all the poor in the whole society and not at just one particular religious group.

Swadesh Singh: For the last 50 years, your work has focused on keeping the whole of society at centre-stage. Since Independence, a lot of work has also been done on equality too. I will now take up the issue of fraternity. How should India move in this direction, as a society?

Krishna Gopal: The Constitution has given equal rights, equal freedom to all. You can go anywhere in the country, live anywhere, get education, get justice, do a job, do business, buy land, vote, contest elections—this is the right of everyone. The Courts are the same for all as is the Constitution, but this, by itself, will not lead to fraternity. Constitution can give rights. But the Constitution is not capable of bringing about a change of mind. For that, something else has to be done. We must remember that the history of the last 700 to 900 years has also deeply ingrained certain memories in people's minds. The invaders cannot be considered as role models, and so this is

a mind-set change which is required. If some people continue to consider those that vandalised and destroyed our temples, imposed Jizya tax and tyrannised and brutalised the people as their leaders, then the rest of the society will associate these people with the invaders, and fraternity will not come about. The first thing then that needs to be done is that the people living in India should be separated from the people who wrote the history of the ruin of this country. Secondly, as I stated earlier, there can be any number of faiths, creeds, sects in the world; the feeling of respect for everyone is the ‘*Sanatan*’ ideology of India. This is what it means to be an Indian—respecting every faith and creed of the world and imagining everyone’s happiness. These two attributes define being an Indian. We have to wait till these two conditions come about, but how this will happen is a difficult question to answer. In Indian tradition, it is a big condition to respect everyone’s views. And imagining everyone’s happiness is the second big condition. When an Indian goes abroad, he takes these two ideas with him and respects the views of the people in that land, whether it is the United States, Canada, UK, Germany or any other part of the globe. He imagines the happiness of the

people there. In his prayer, he always says ‘*Sarve Bhavantu Sukhin*’: If these two things will come to all people, then it will be easy to bring a sense of fraternity. Yes, we have had hundreds of years of turmoil, struggles, ups and downs and suffering, but today we are free. An Independent India means India remembering its ancient glorious form, keeping its philosophy in mind, moving forward in the light of that philosophy which portrays unity in diversity. Many a time, this diversity is understood in the form of a bundle of hundreds of different types of wood, tied with a rope. This is true, but it is only a half-truth. Let us understand it in terms of a tree, which has multiple branches that proliferate and extend all around. The root is however the same. The diversity that India envisions is vastly expanded from one branch of this tree to the other. The unity is in the root, diversity is seen only in the branches. Conflicts can arise in that diversity, but if fundamental unity is seen then these struggles and differences cease. This is the fundamental philosophy of India. To see ‘One’ in many. And this vision of ‘Oneness’ has the power to end all discrimination, jealousy and conflict. There is great power in unity. The vision of unity is capable of quelling all conflicts and disputes.



Chinese Aggressiveness in the Region: An Analysis

Dhruv C. Katoch*

China's growing aggressiveness in recent years has much to do with China's self-image and how its citizens perceive China's place in the comity of nations. While individuals have personality traits, a survey of a group of countries carried out over three years has suggested that a country too, can be said to have personality traits.¹ With respect to China, this survey suggests that as a country, Chinese people exhibit two distinct traits. One, they have a deep, abiding belief in the ideals of humanism, encompassing altruism, compassion, and understanding. Two, the people showed a preference for order and organisation. They preferred certainty and thoroughness, and often judged success in terms of task accomplishment. On the macro level then, it appears that humanism and order are two traits valued by the Chinese people.

So, if humanism and order constitute the personality of China, why is China perceived as an aggressive and volatile force? This is where the concept of a Nation's character comes in. This refers to the shared beliefs or perceptions of personality characteristics common to members of a particular nation, both within the nation and outside it. This perception of China in the eyes of its own people and even outside of China is controlled by the Communist Party of China, the CPC, which founded the People's Republic of China (PRC) and is its sole ruling party.

Viewed through this lens, the personality of China is not congruent with its character. This has the potential to lead to internal unrest, protests and displeasure against the ruling dispensation. Hence, we see the heavy hand of propaganda inside and outside of China, by the CCP controlled outlets, trying to convince their own people and the outside world that a CPC run China, actually functions in terms of the Chinese personality and is humanistic, orderly and completes its projects in a timely manner, keeping the good of the people at heart. The ending of poverty in China is hence an important landmark, along with projects such as the One Belt one Road which are termed as China's humanistic and altruistic outreach. The crackdown on corruption can also be seen in a similar light.

There is also a third characteristic which defines China and that is its sense of nationalism, grounded in the belief that China was once a great power and that it must regain that status. This sense of nationalism dates back to well before the establishment of the PRC, but it was the PRC which has, since 1949, promoted the narrative of the 'Century of Humiliation,' which is largely conceived as having begun with the first Opium War in 1839, in which the Royal Navy opened up China to Western capitalism, and ended in 1949, with the PRC coming to power in China. This discourse reiterates the humiliation of the Chinese people, the dismemberment of territory, the loss of

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sovereignty to foreign powers and domestic weakness and corruption.

This sense of nationalism also drives China's foreign policy, with the PRC being sensitive to public concerns and taking into account popular nationalist sentiments. As an example, in 2012, when tensions arose over the disputed Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands, the Chinese public boycotted Japanese products, linking the same to patriotism. There is a deep sense of hurt amongst the Chinese people of what happened after the Japanese Imperial Army seized Nanjing on 13 December 1937. For the next six weeks, the conquerors went on a rampage, killing all the Chinese soldiers who survived, which was against the canons of war. But worse, they murdered the civilian population, raped the women and pillaged and burnt the township.² This massacre still weighs heavily on the Chinese consciousness. It is the Chinese public which is averse to the continuing Japanese practice of honouring of its WWII martyrs at the Yasukuni Shrine. This public vehemence at times outstrips even the hardliners within the PRC government, serving to push policy further toward hawkishness, with netizens criticising their own country's policymakers for not being aggressive enough. And if China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) is perceived to be undermining Chinese interests, then they too are subjected to ridicule by the public. Two factors indicate this trend. One, China's MFA receives calcium pills when the public feels their diplomats need to stiffen up their backbone—a popular choice of insult to indicate spinelessness. And two, in the online world, the MFA has garnered the unofficial nickname 'the Ministry of Protests' due to its tendency to do little more than issue

denouncements of unfavourable international developments. It is this public pressure which has perhaps forced a change within China's diplomatic community, leading to what we now see as wolf warrior envoys.³

With this as a background, let us look into Chinese aggressive policies astride its land borders as well as in the Western Pacific. Since early 1990s, while China was pursuing its economic and military growth agenda, it did not want its growth to be seen as threatening to its neighbours. So, Beijing resorted to the rhetoric of its peaceful rise and was restrained in its foreign policy options. It engaged with regional multilateral organisations such as ASEAN, and with neighbouring states, using trade and investment deals to foster better relations. But as China grew in strength and clout, its foreign policy too has distinctly changed, with Beijing now focussed on aggressively promoting its core interests, getting more assertive with its neighbours and pushing back with greater confidence against the United States. Towards this end, China has not shied away from applying military and other coercive economic and diplomacy leverages to further its interests. That is why we see Beijing intensifying its construction activities on the artificial islands it has constructed in the South China Sea, and despite protests from the US and neighbouring states, continues with the construction of airstrips and other military facilities in these islands. In the economic sphere, China continues to intrude into the exclusive economic zone (EEZ) of its neighbours to carry out fishing and oil exploration activities. With respect to Taiwan, Japan, Philippines, and some other ASEAN countries, China is resorting to increased

military activity, especially in the East China Sea and in the Taiwan Straits, as also in exerting economic and diplomatic pressure. These changes are reflective of a weakening uni-polar world order taking place concurrently with China's rise. China now feels it can push back against the U.S.-led international system, to promote a new international order.⁴

It must be remembered here that China's rise took place in a uni-polar world. While unipolarity creates strong incentives for states to balance the unipole, there is a cost attached to such balancing which makes the challenger tread cautiously. As China grew in strength, it resorted to soft balancing, which is what we see playing out today. While not directly challenging the United States, it is using military and non-military means such as territorial denial and entangling diplomacy to delay, frustrate and undermine US policies. It desists from hard balancing which is reflected by military build up and military alliances, because of the high transaction costs involved. Hard balancing is easier to achieve in a bipolar or multi-polar environment but in a uni-polar environment, hard balancing would be viewed as revisionism and as a dangerous threat to international order. That is why Beijing, rather than confronting the United States directly, has fixed its attention to its own neighbourhood. In East Asia, while Beijing is confronted with the dominant position which the US occupies, because of China's strengthened economic and military capabilities, and because of the advantage that accrues to it from geography, it has greater confidence to do something about it. No rising power would want military bases and forward-deployed troops of its rivals next to one's own borders. This is why China, with the growth

of its economic and military might, seeks to control its immediate neighbourhood and is pushing back at US dominance. The quest for influence between the US and China in this region will thus continue to increase in intensity as time goes by. The imperative for the US, due to geographical distance from the region, will be to continue to expand its diplomatic, economic and especially military reach in the region. The Quad is but one manifestation of US efforts to keep China in check.

But the real story is that a change is in the offing, though it may be many years distant from the present moment. Essentially, the uni-polar dynamics is weakening, and other dynamics are strengthening, presenting Beijing with a variable set of options in which it can manoeuvre in east Asia. For this, the CPC would rely on the support of its people, in the absence of which its ability to manoeuvre gets restricted. As of now, the Chinese sense of nationalism provides the necessary level of support to the CCP to pursue its agenda.

The Chinese strategy of promoting a narrative of a peaceful and non-threatening rise amongst its neighbours was predicated on US unipolarity. In the circumstances, a low-profile approach was possible. With China's rise, its resistance to US power has also increased, though it still desists from carrying out hard balancing options. An example of resistance is the defensive measures that have been instituted by China against the most threatening elements of US military power such as China's Anti Area Access Denial (A2/AD) strategy. This encompasses the creation of artificial islands and militarising the same with airstrips, submarine pens, logistical support for its warships etc, along with adequate Air Defence cover, to

push back against US naval and air power. It is a sea denial strategy, to restrict US military options in the Western Pacific, more specifically in the South and East China Sea.⁵

The show by China of its anti-ship ballistic missiles in its military parades is also designed to send a clear message to Washington that China has the capability to sink US aircraft carriers. By augmenting its A2/AD capabilities, China has raised the cost and the risks for the US to operate its aircrafts and ships close to China's near seas. China is also attempting to shape international developments by increased activities in setting the agenda in multilateral organisations, without directly confronting the US. In a Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA), held in Shanghai in 2014, Xi Jinping, in his keynote address, sketched out a new security architecture for Asia.⁶ His advocacy for a new Asian based regional security cooperation architecture was obviously a challenge to the US role in regional security and was the first instance since the end of the Cold War that such an iteration had been made by a Chinese leader. In the economic sphere, China has responded to the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) and to the US led regional free trade agreement, with Free Trade Area of the Asia Pacific (FTAAP) and Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP). The latter was concluded in 2020, albeit without India. China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has to be seen in this light. To maintain its position, the US launched its pivot or rebalance to Asia under the Obama administration and now is invigorating the Quad. But the US strategy has been a bit incoherent, which has resulted in uncertainty in

US allies and partners about the extent of US engagement and commitment. This is still playing out.

But internal power dynamics are also playing out in China, which could impact on the single party rule of the CPC. The four Chinese modernisations which have been underway over the last four decades have seen rapid economic development in China which has huge implications for Chinese society and its relationship with the CPC. The economic reforms which were initiated necessitated granting more space to Chinese entrepreneurs, which in turn has created a more diverse and active Chinese society, in which voices have emerged that are not shy of expressing opinions that are critical of developments within and outside China. The spread of communication technology and the increasing use of social media platforms has also produced societal change which could potentially challenge the CPC's capacity to rule. This has increased the party leaderships proclivity with maintaining domestic control and legitimacy, even to the extent of using increasingly repressive methods to deal with the situation, if so required. At the same time, efforts by the CPC continue apace to seek support from the society to maintain the existing order. The support sought is no longer for ideological legitimacy but for performance, the commitment being to provide the Chinese people with higher standards of living, economic development, peace and stability as part of the social contract. This remains the main claim to legitimacy of the CPC led by Xi Jinping, but as expectations within Chinese society are rising, the leadership will continue to be tested in the years to come.⁷

Chinese societal expectations are not just

confined to economic concerns but to nationalists ambitions as well. As China grows, the yearning in society to regain its perceived past glory is all too evident. This growing nationalist sentiment will constrain Chinese foreign policy choices, forcing it on a more belligerent path and reducing room for manoeuvre. This was evident in the 2012 anti-Japanese protests in China that flared up after Japan's nationalisation of three Senkaku Islands. The Chinese government termed the act as a "gross violation" of Chinese sovereignty over the territory, and hinted at taking military action, but did not go down that path.⁸ That may change, with heightened concerns among the CPC to meet people's demands. We now see nationalism in China projecting to Chinese claims in the surrounding seas, and being linked to the domestic legitimacy of Chinese ruling clique. The CPC will however have to balance out its foreign policy objectives with the consequences such policies may have on the Chinese economy. How the dynamics between the top-down nationalism and the bottom-up nationalism in China plays out remains to be seen, but the present leadership is seen to be less averse to risk-taking and in promoting a more uncompromising nationalism, to advance what are perceived to be China's legitimate claims. The construct here is based on a Chinese civilisational rejuvenation, drawn from its imagined glorious past, which gives it adequate scope to operate outside the confines of a straitjacketed ideology and also to expand its territorial reach.⁹ Such an approach is perforce more aggressive, which explains why Chinese diplomats are taking a stronger position on nationalist issues. We can thus expect to see more

volatility on foreign policy issues in the coming years, especially with relation to Chinese claims on Taiwan. It must be noted here that President Xi Jinping is personally invested in the above narrative, to claim his place among the leading figures in the CPC pantheon.¹⁰

The coming years will thus see greater belligerence from China, with increasing militarisation of both the South and East China Seas. Military confrontation, in all probability will be avoided, with China resorting to non-military methods to attain its territorial objectives and to achieve national rejuvenation. The ASEAN countries will attempt some form of rapprochement with China, on their respective claim lines, but Japan will in all probability dramatically increase its defence spending and seek parity with Chinese naval and air power in the Western Pacific.

For India, we have the advantage of geography in the Indian Ocean Region, but would have to ensure an effective naval presence to guard our interests. The Quad serves India's security interests though it is not yet a security grouping. On India's border with Tibet, it is a conflict which India will have to fight alone, should the situation so arise, though help in the form of intelligence and logistic support will in all likelihood come from the US and others. The key factor in any war over the Himalayas will be cyber and space capability and control over the skies over the Tibetan Plateau. So long as India is prepared, China will be reluctant to undertake a military adventure which she may well lose. Internal stability, economic growth, military preparedness and astute diplomacy thus will be the essential components of India's response to Chinese belligerence.

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India-Australia Trade Pact: Unlocking the Potential

Rajaram Panda*

Introduction

As two major liberal democracies in the Indo-Pacific region, India and Australia share common viewpoints on many regional and global matters. Relations between the two countries have undergone transformative evolution in recent years. The bilateral relationship is special and this is characterised by shared value of a pluralistic, parliamentary democracies, Commonwealth traditions, expanding economic engagement, long-standing people-to-people ties and increasing high level interaction¹. Both are members of the Quad, a major grouping consisting of Japan and the US as other two, and engaging at summit levels and at the level of defence and foreign ministers on continuous basis to discuss regional issues. While the political understanding is in place, the potentials to deepen economic ties have not been honed as desired. This lacuna has now been removed with the signing of the India-Australia Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement (ECTA) in April 2022. While hailing the trade deal and admitting both sides are 50 years late in enhancing ties, Union Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal said it is “better late than ever”.²

Goyal was on a three-day visit to Australia to ink the trade pact. While addressing a key event at Melbourne University, Goyal said the pact gives both countries an opportunity to get back the

“brotherhood, fraternity and togetherness that was rightly due”. The signing of the trade pact opens up opportunity for other agreements in education, particularly on the healthcare sector. Greater cooperation in the healthcare sector has been realised after the remarkable service rendered by doctor, nurses, paramedical workers for saving peoples’ lives during the Covid-19 pandemic. Goyal held wide-ranging discussions with his Australian counterpart Dan Tehan in the outgoing Scott Morrison government on carrying forward the ECTA. One does not see any change in Australia’s commitment to deepen ties with India by the new Labor government headed by Anthony Albanese.

ECTA is the first trade agreement of India with a developed country after more than a decade and provides for an institutional mechanism to improve trade between the two countries. In February 2022, India signed a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with the UAE and is currently working on FTAs with Israel, Canada, UK and the EU. Australia is also the third OECD country after Japan and Korea with which India has signed an FTA. This agreement has strategic significance too, as both India and Australia are part of the Quad and partners in the Supply Chain Resilience Initiative (SCRI)³. India negotiated some important trade pacts in the past that involved large economies such as those of the Association of South East

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Asian Nations (ASEAN), Japan, Korea, Singapore and Malaysia. Indian Industry, however, did not show the kind of enthusiasm it is expressing for recent trade deals, first with the UAE and now with Australia. One of the major factors behind this new FTA confidence and support shown by Indian Industry is that the government has identified the right set of countries for such trade and aggressively ensured meaningful market access for Indian exports.⁴

Goyal too held talks with Tony Abbott, then Australian PM Morrison's Special Trade Envoy. Australia is the 17th largest trading partner of India and India is Australia's 9th largest trading partner. The trade pact shall pave the way to deepen economic ties, increase bilateral trade and investment, besides forging unity among Quad members. The agreement would help in taking bilateral trade from USD 27.5 billion at present to USD 45-50 billion in the next five years. India's goods exports were worth USD 6.9 billion and imports aggregated to USD 15.1 billion in 2021⁵. This trade imbalance could be because of the composition of trade, which is tilted in Australia's favour. The new trade pact is expected to address this trade imbalance issue. Goyal is optimistic that both countries should aim for USD 100 billion bilateral trade volume by 2030.⁶

On 2 April, India and Australia signed the Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement (IndAus ECTA) under which both the countries are providing duty-free access to a huge number of goods and relaxing norms to promote trade in services. Besides agreement on dual degrees in the education sector, scope for cooperation in promoting service trade also look promising.

Research, start-ups and agri-tech are other areas for potential cooperation. Australian companies can look at India as the fast-growing economy to invest in the infrastructure sector. Australia has a huge investible surplus and investment in projects in India can fetch fair return to Australia. Strengthening air and shipping connectivity with focus on expanding direct shipping lines between India and Australia can be a win-win situation for both sides. As Goyal's then counterpart Dan Tehan described, the trade pact is a "unity agreement" and a comprehensive one. Council for Leather Exports (CLE) Vice Chairman Rajendra Kumar Jalan said that leather is a part of the agreement and the pact would promote its trade with Australia.

Another highlight of the trade pact is that it will give about 85 per cent of Australia's exports zero-duty access to the Indian market, including coal, sheep meat and wool, and lower duty access on Australian wines, almonds, lentils, and certain fruits⁷. Prime Minister Narendra Modi described the trade pact as a "watershed moment" and "one of the biggest economic doors".⁸ India needs to be watchful if the trade imbalance is not further widened unless reciprocal facilities are utilised properly. The trade pact is set to provide zero-duty access to 96 per cent of India's exports to Australia including shipments from key sectors such as engineering goods, gems and jewellery, textiles, apparels and leather. Zero-duty access for Indian goods is set to be expanded to 100 per cent over five years under the agreement. According to a government estimate, the pact shall also generate over one million jobs in India.⁹

The future in the education sector also looks promising. The agreement shall facilitate student

exchange, professionals and tourists, deepening bilateral ties. Under the agreement, Indian graduates from STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) will be granted extended post-study work visas. Australia will also set up a programme to grant visas to young Indians looking to pursue working holidays in Australia¹⁰. The agreement shall come into force after it is ratified by the Australian Parliament.

Currently, a number of Indian exports face a tariff disadvantage of 4-5% in many labour-intensive sectors relative to competitors — those with FTAs with Australia — such as China, Thailand, Vietnam. Removing this barrier could enhance merchandise exports significantly. Under the pact, Indian goods and services exports to Australia are expected to reach USD 20 billion in FY2027 and USD 35 billion in FY2035, up from about USD 10.5 billion in 2021. Australian wine imports, almonds, lentils, oranges, mandarins, pears, apricots and strawberries are set to benefit from lower tariffs under the agreement. India has, however, excluded a number of Australian products from tariff reductions under the agreement to protect “sensitive sectors” including dairy products, wheat, rice, chickpeas, beef, sugar, apples, toys and iron ore.

While negotiating the trade pact, Indian side took into consideration and kept the interests of the Indian industry where it has certain sensitivities. Many sensitive products were kept in the exclusion category (29.8 per cent of tariff lines). These included milk and dairy, walnut, pistachio nuts, bajra, apple, sunflower seed oil, oil cake, gold, silver, platinum, and many medical devices. This is a major gain for India under the ECTA. India also managed

to get commercially meaningful offers from Australia in several sectors. This included 1,800 Indian traditional chefs and yoga teachers entering Australia as contractual service suppliers, post-study visas for Indian students, the pursuit of a mutual recognition agreement on professional qualifications, and an enhanced commitment on the movement of professionals as intra-corporate transferees. These are some of the key gains for Indian service sectors.

Australia is a major exporter of key resources, some of which India needs to import to sustain its economic growth. For example, coal accounts for 74 per cent of Australia’s exports to India and accounts a duty of 2.5 per cent. The elimination of duties on coking coal is expected to boost the competitiveness of Indian steel exports. Zero-duty access for Australia is set to increase to cover 91 per cent of its exports by value and over 70 per cent of India’s tariff lines over 10 years. Other key Australian products which will see tariffs eliminated when the agreement comes into force include LNG, wool, sheep meat, alumina and metallic ores while tariffs on avocados, onions, pistachios, macadamias, cashews in-shell, blueberries, raspberries and blackberries are set to be eliminated over seven years. Procuring lower cost raw materials such as alumina from Australia is in India’s interest as it will boost the international competitiveness of Indian manufacturers¹¹.

One factor that led to an early push for Australia to clinch the trade deal after over a decade of negotiations stemmed from its worsening trade ties with China. Both the countries began talks on the trade deal back in 2011, but discussions were bogged down and suspended in September

2015 after nine rounds of negotiations, pending the outcome of other multilateral negotiations. The spark was provided and it was reignited when Australia-China trade ties strained over tariff issue. Australia's demand for a WHO inquiry to the origin of the virus worsened relations. The government of Scott Morrison in Australia sought to diversify exports markets and reduce Australia's dependence on its biggest trading partner China, after diplomatic spats led to Beijing sanctioning certain Australian products.¹² As Australia wanted to reduce its dependence on China, diversifying export markets facilitated early conclusion of the trade pact with India. As natural partners, the relations between India and Australia rest on the pillars of trust and reliability. The negotiations, therefore, for the ECTA were formally re-launched on 30 September 2021 and concluded on a fast-track basis by the end of March 2022.

The trade pact follows the decision of both countries to upgrade their relationship to a Comprehensive Partnership in the middle of 2021. It cannot be missed that the economic agreement has a strategic angle attached to it.¹³ There is a new dimension to India's FTA negotiations with foreign countries. Earlier, India negotiated with potential trade partners mainly for market access for business professionals under Mode 4 (Movement of Natural Persons), but now the emphasis shifted to market access to all of India's merchandise exports.

Before the trade pact was signed with Australia, Indian exports faced a tariff disadvantage of 4-5 per cent in many labour-intensive sectors *vis-a-vis* competitors in the Australian market such as China, Thailand,

Vietnam, South Korea, Japan, Indonesia and Malaysia. Removing these barriers under the ECTA shall enhance India's merchandise exports significantly. Once the pact is ratified by the Australian Parliament and come into force, all the major traditional Indian exports, such as textiles and apparel, select agriculture and marine products, leather, footwear, furniture, gems and jewellery, pharma and engineering products, etc, stand to gain immensely. Since the composition of export items from Australia is heavily concentrated in raw materials and intermediate products, many industries in India will get cheaper raw material and thus become more competitive, particularly in sectors like steel, aluminium, power, engineering and so on. This also could address to the issue of correcting trade imbalance, which is now in Australia's favour. UM

One of the breakthroughs achieved under the ECTA is that the Australian government agreed to amend its domestic tax law to stop taxation of the offshore income of Indian firms providing technical services to Australia. This was a long-pending demand of the Indian IT industry. Once the amendment is made, the Indian tech companies would no longer be required to pay taxes on offshore revenues in Australia, which would enhance their competitiveness in the international market. It may be noted that though India successfully negotiated an excellent trade deal for businesses, one cannot brush under the carpet the fact that Australia has currently 16 FTAs under operation, and therefore accessing the Australian market would not be a cakewalk.¹⁴ The onus lies on India to improve its competitiveness, as in most trade sectors, India would be competing with the

likes of China, ASEAN, Chile, Japan, Korea and New Zealand. These countries have already-functional FTAs with Australia and therefore can pose serious competition for India.¹⁵

What makes the trade pact significant that India is the world's largest democracy and is a market for 1.3 billion people? Its youthful population, diversified economy and growth trajectory present significant opportunity for Australian business, including in education, agriculture, energy, resources, tourism, healthcare, financial services, infrastructure, science and innovation, and sport.¹⁶ Indeed the trade deal is historic in India-Australia relations and would open up new vista in many more fronts.

The joint media report with Morrison released on 2 April 2022 said that Australian households and businesses will benefit, with 96 per cent of Indian goods imports entering Australia duty-free once the agreement enters into force. This covers many products which currently attract 4-5 per cent customs duty in Australia. Labour-intensive sectors which would gain immensely include textiles and apparel, few agricultural and fish products, leather, footwear, furniture, sports goods, jewellery, machinery, electrical goods and railway wagons.¹⁷

One can see further activism from the Indian side as following the signing of the trade pact, Coal and Mines Minister Prahlad Joshi visited Australia in early July 2022 to build upon an MoU signed between Khanij Bidesh India (KA Bill), a joint venture of three central public sector entities under the mines ministry and Critical Minerals Facilitation Office (CMFO) of Australia. The MoU envisages USD 6 million as initial funding to be shared equally by both countries towards a shared ambition to

develop secure, robust and commercially viable critical minerals supply chains¹⁸. Joshi visited mineral-rich sites of Tianqi Lithium Kwinana and Green bushes mines and held talks with key ministers in the Australian government. Bilateral cooperation between India and Australia in this critical sector shall help in India's transition towards clean energy ambitions. The steps will complement India's mineral security for e-mobility initiatives and other diversified sectors entailing usage of critical and strategic minerals. Indeed, India is among the fastest growing economies in the world and there is huge scope for collaboration in the mineral sector. Technology transfer, knowledge-sharing and investment in critical minerals like lithium and cobalt are strategic to achieving clean energy ambitions.¹⁹ Australia is in possession of critical minerals like lithium, cobalt and vanadium, all critical for the manufacturing of critical electronic components.

The commitment of Australia's minister for resources Madeleine King of A\$8 million to the three-year bilateral Critical Minerals Investment Partnership with the aim to lowering emissions and boosting the use of renewable energy was another highlight.²⁰

Australia has noted the potentials of India's growth projections, with GDP at 9 per cent in 2021-22 and 2022-23, and 7.1 per cent in 2023-24. Australian government's goal is to lift India to its top three export markets by 2035, and to make India the third largest destination in Asia for outward Australian investment. Australia is confident that the agreement would create enormous trade diversification opportunities for Australian producers and service providers bound for India,

valued at up to USD 14.8 billion each year.²¹ By unlocking the huge market of around 1.3 billion consumers in India, Australia hopes to strengthen the economy, and create jobs.

To list the benefits of ECTA, the following are worth-noting²².

- Sheep meat tariffs of 30 per cent will be eliminated on entry into force, providing a boost for Australian exports that already command nearly 20 per cent of India's market
- Wool will have the current 2.5 per cent tariffs eliminated on entry into force, supporting Australia's second-largest market for wool products.
- Tariffs on wine with a minimum import price of USD 5 per bottle will be reduced from 150 per cent to 100 per cent on entry into force and subsequently to 50 per cent over 10 years (based on Indian wholesale price index for wine).
- Tariffs on wine bottles with minimum import price of USD 15 will be reduced from 150 per cent to 75 per cent on entry into force and subsequently to 25 per cent over 10 years (based on Indian wholesale price index for wine).
- Tariffs up to 30 per cent on avocados, onions, broad, kidney and adzuki beans, cherries, shelled pistachios, macadamias, cashews in-shell, blueberries, raspberries, blackberries, currants will be eliminated over seven years.
- Tariffs on almonds, lentils, oranges, mandarins, pears, apricots and strawberries will be reduced, improving opportunities for Australia's horticulture industry to supply

India's growing food demand.

- The resources sector will benefit from the elimination of tariffs on entry into force for coal, alumina, metallic ores, including manganese, copper and nickel; and critical minerals including titanium and zirconium.
- LNG tariffs will be bound at 0 per cent at entry into force.
- Tariffs on pharmaceutical products and certain medical devices will be eliminated over five and seven years.²³

The outgoing Morrison Government unveiled plans to invest USD 280 million to further the growing economic ties and support jobs and businesses in both countries. These include:²⁴

- USD 35.7 million to support cooperation on research, production and commercialisation of clean technologies, critical minerals and energy;
- USD 25.2 million to deepen space cooperation with India and
- USD 28.1 million to launch a Centre for Australia-India Relations.

Though the trade pact was cheered by wine exporters and sheep farmers, dairy and grain farmers were a bit disappointed. While wine exporters in Australia can recover from their loss over China with export opportunities to India, the same cannot be said for other sectors. The significant reduction of tariffs shall help Australian wine exporters and sheep farmers. Dairy and grain industries expected a better deal and feel the agreement is a major lost opportunity for market expansion.²⁵ Since the trade war began with China, Australia's wine industry was looking to find new markets. The trade deal with India came in perfect

time to rescue the industry.

When the trade war broke out with China in 2020, China announced to impose tariff up to 200 per cent on all Australian wine. Though the new deal with India shall not help the wine industry recover all losses, it is seen as a vital step towards addressing the national oversupply of wine. The Chinese wine market for Australia was USD 1.2 billion when it was closed in 2020. Though the new frontier in India could help to recover to some extent, the entire loss from the Chinese market cannot be recovered. It is encouraging that imports of Australian wines to India increased by 71 per cent by volume and 81 per cent by value in 2021, the base was small. Besides India, Australian wine industry is also looking to expand into Southeast Asia and Scandinavia. Its established markets are the US, Canada and Britain.

As regards wool, the trade deal shall remove the five per cent tariff on exports to India to zero. Already being the second biggest export market for the product, it will be a win-win situation for both countries. Though India's consumption of wool is small compared with China, this shall pave the way for larger exports in quantity as the buying power of the Indian consumers has increased considerably. Before the trade pact, India provided a limited market for Australian lamb and mutton products as the tariff imposed was 20 per cent. After the pact, Australian exporters of these products shall benefit as tariffs have been removed as imports by India are likely to rise every year.

As mentioned, dairy farmers were disappointed as the sector was completely excluded in the FTA. Probably Goyal factored during negotiations that including this sector would

have been a threat to India's domestic industry and thus would have affected India's social fabric. With a large population and majority in the agriculture sector, India has the largest dairy industry in the world and the interests of farmers mostly with two to four cows had to be protected in any trade negotiations with a foreign country. Australia still pins hope for bringing this sector on board in future negotiations.

Like the dairy sectors, the grain growers in Australia are too disappointed as they miss out on the Indian market from exporting premium Australian chickpeas. The interim FTA offers some potential benefits for Australian lentils exporters who hope to see over time benefits for faba beans, canola oil and soyabean, the grain sector expected more access to the Indian market. The grain growers see the pact as a "huge missed opportunity for the chickpea market".

Long-term Benefit for India

Though the trade pact is expected to come into force by August 2022 or so, India is likely to leverage the pact with Australia and earlier with the UAE to ensure long-term economical energy security. Global supply chain disruption is one of the major causes of concerns for import-dependent nations. The Russia-Ukraine crisis further exacerbated the situation. The oil price volatility forced state-run oil companies to raise petrol and diesel prices frequently. India, which is the world's third largest consumer of fossil fuels, imports 85 per cent of its crude oil requirement and 54 per cent of its natural gas. India's coal imports from Australia are increasing and already emerged as the main source of imports of India's total coal

requirements. The new trade pact would further boost energy imports from Australia which has an edge over LNG and liquefied petroleum gas for cooking and automobiles.²⁶

The trade pact with Australia also signals that India's trade policy is moving into higher gear. This also removes tariff disadvantages India suffered in merchandise exports of labour-intensive goods *vis-a-vis* China and ASEAN countries because of RCEP. Leaning towards import substitution will blunt India's export competitiveness over time. It denies India cheaper components that reduce product manufacturing costs. Also, the strategic implications of the trade pact cannot be overlooked because as bilateral trade and mutual trust grow, it will be easier for both sides to get on the same page in countering China's dominance in the Indo-Pacific region. The onus lies on both sides that the momentum is maintained to reap the benefits for a win-wins situation.

Conclusion

Backing the trade pact, former Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott who played a critical

role in the trade agreement observed that if China can weaponise trade, it becomes compelling for Australia that it invests on India and target bilateral trade to reach USD 100 billion by 2035.²⁷ While Australia-China relationship was built on people-to-people ties which took the bilateral trade to USD 75 billion, India and Australia were always cultural partners. The trade pact shall unlock huge opportunities for Indian exports of automobiles, textiles, footwear and leather products, gems and jewellery, toys and plastic products.

It is also argued that as two liberal democracies coming together with this pact and being part of the Quad, and further complimented by joint naval exercises, both can fight an "assertive and autocratic government" in the Indo-Pacific region and strengthen supply chain, especially around critical minerals. In a clear reference to an assertive China, it was remarked that if an autocratic government that is seeking to change the rules of the game, then the India-Australia trade pact shall help both to fight to keep the rules-based order in place and make sure all countries in the Indo-Pacific can continue to flourish.

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