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Religious Harmony, Religious Universality and Social Solidarity

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ABSTRACT

The Indian society is characterised by diverse cultural and religious traditions. Their richness and uniqueness are indispensable but the forces of change and modernization, and some vested interests have not only reduced their importance but have also adversely affected the united cultural fabrics, leading to disintegration among diverse cultures, and cultural & religious groups. Very often we speak of unity in diversity but now there is the need to harmonize diversities with greater focus on religious diversity and widening division among various religious groups to secure national stability and harmony. This paper is an attempt in this direction as to how we can secure unity in diversity, particularly the unity of faith because faith is the root cause of diversity, as well as, the unity among the people and among various segments of the society. The paper identifies commonalities, consisting of the common universal core in religious diversity which can empower the society to establish unity among religious traditions, whether they are at the margin or at the core of the system of faith. The religious diversities give rise to commonalities, and therefore, diversities are needed but they are to be left behind to provide space to the commonalities to come at the front to be considered as the universal religion, a uniting force among the diversities. Those forces have to be preserved by the positive and coordinated roles of various

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agencies which are functioning at present in the diverse disjointed ways to be injurious to the unity of faith and national stability. The paper briefly reflects upon this aspect also. It is simply a qualitative paper based on secondary sources, reading materials and observation.

Introduction

The concept of nationalism entails desirability of cultural diversities and various forms of smaller national identities but the centrality of the concept entails the idea of loyalty to the nation first in spite of diversities and various forms of nationalities. They are to be merged into and subordinated to the broader notion of nationalism which entails the idea of organic unity and of the subordination of identities into the whole. The whole co-exists with the smaller subordinate identities. They exist together but they exist into a hierarchy as nationality and sub-nationalities. Thus, the idea of nationalism entails the idea of organic unity among the identities with the idea of enforcing the broader concept of nationalism which consists of diversity of identities and diverse cultural traditions. They are desirable because they provide cultural richness and support structures to the superior nationality. The cultural identities are inherited by the people who are born into a particular group identity, whether it is caste, class, ethnic, linguistic, regional or religious, and thus, their identities or sub-nationalities differ which determine their interest, sentiment, attachment, aspiration and consciousness toward their groups, cultures and identities. They promote in a natural fashion their inherited subordinate nationalities but at the same time, they are also born in a nation with national identity which is also inherited by them. Both the national and sub-national identities are simultaneously inherited by those who are born into them and the attributes of both the identities are to be preserved, conserved and celebrated by them with no conflict between the inherited sub-nationalism and the nationalism with the clear and accepted understanding of subordination of all sub-identities to only one identity of the nation which is an organic whole like the national community or the idea of Indianness and the Indianised identity which is over and above smaller identities. The indianised identity is an organic, secular, liberal, democratic, universal and civilised identity, representing the collective aspiration, sentiment and consciousness of the people. The national community represents a composite identity beyond the human tendency of affiliating themselves to the social particularities. Every individual is required to pursue the interests of the nation and the

national community first and then their particularised interests, but at the same time, it is required by the nation to bind each and every diversified cultural groups, cultural and religious traditions, unite them, protect them and bring them together into a national community.

The national community is a community of communities, stemming from and representing to diversities, and thus, the national community has relatively greater responsibility to function in a disciplined manner before it expects discipline from its subjects and the subordinate identities. The nation as community and those who lead it are required to pursue '*rajdharmā*' to harmonize identities, unite them, protect them and make them feel free to pursue their own cultures and traditions without any fear, resentment, rebellion and unrest in their mind. The national community must pursue the wisdom of great epics of multiple cultural traditions which existed and flourished on the Indian soil. India is a unique nation because of its diversity of rich cultural traditions. All the communities and their diverse traditions have the role in making the nation and national community richer and stronger, provided they are facilitated to flourish well but the growing fragmentation and division among them and their misuse is to be reduced by harmonizing them and uniting them. This is possible if we identify commonalities of diverse traditions as the uniting force. If we go deeper into the cultural diversity we may find something in common and cohesive which have made the Indian tradition survive and flourish. Those common traits among them are to be identified and brought together to form into an organised, integrated, culturally inclusive and a common cohesive intellectual cultural heritage of the nation which can be called as the totality of a plural Indian cultures to be developed, adopted, inculcated and imbibed by each citizen. This would be an effective and responsive means to forge the bonds of emotion, sentiment and attachment which bind the people together to reinforce local identities but the local bonds and local identities need to be replaced by the bonds of common and universal bonds of cultural diversity which can serve the same purpose but at the higher level to bind the people together to promote the bonds of togetherness to serve the national cause. This does not mean that the local identities and cultural-religious diversities are to be neglected. They must be permitted to flourish but at the same time amicable ways must be discovered to unite them to promote the social stability of the nation.

There are two bonds of togetherness: local and universal. There are bonds which are localised, related to familial, ethnic, racial, tribal,

caste and class groups, regional, linguistic, religious, environmental and different lifestyle and associated cultural patterns. They determine the bonds of attachment, sentiment, emotion, consciousness and aspiration. They consist of rich and unique cultural traits which are inescapable and inevitable. They are unique and add something new to the complex cultural whole, characterized not only by localised specificities of cultural traits but also by the attributes of the universal commonality. The specificities, as well as, the commonalities of the complex cultural whole characterize the nation and represent the national ethos. The universal bonds are the common attributes of diversities. The universal bonds of attachment and togetherness are relatively more important than the local bonds of attachment and togetherness for want of national stability and harmony but this does not mean that the localised identities should be overlooked because they provide the base structure to the universal identity. They are dynamic and changing. They always add something new in terms of their art forms to the universal identity, making the complex cultural whole richer and stronger. In a democratic setup where there is freedom of faith and expression, it is important to protect, celebrate, recognize and respect every cultural identity and provide stronger support to them to flourish to restore the glory of our civilised past and march ahead towards the higher goals of cultural enlightenment. Each local segment of diversity must be provided the opportunity to feel that they are equal partners in the progress of the nation and have the constructive role in making the nation prosperous and stronger in every respect. According to the ideology of integral humanism, a nation cannot flourish well if the cultural specificities and the common people are excluded, marginalised and discriminated. In order to make the nation socially inclusive, integrated and stronger, every cultural identity and every person at the bottom of the society is to be uplifted and mainstreamed, irrespective of their of their local cultural specificities or social particularities. Further, if the particularities become the factors of exclusion, discrimination and exploitation, the nation loses social cohesiveness and social harmony, and thus becomes weak (Jaffrelot, 2007). The history proves the fact that the diversities can never be abolished and suppressed. The efforts to suppress them have proved to be more explosive and harmful and the efforts to recognise and accommodate them have proved to be prosperous. For example, when Buddhism and Brahmanism flourished in ancient India, the country reached the great heights of achievement and glory but when the rise of neo-Brahmanism led to disregard and suppress Buddhism, the

decline of the nation began. Similarly, during the middle ages when one king provided respect and equal treatment to all religious identities, it facilitated splendid success but when the religious harmony was reversed, it led to the down fall of the state(Kabir,1966).The message is that the cultural integration, cultural unity and social harmony are needed as against cultural fragmentation and cultural division.

Religious Harmony

In the backdrop briefly elaborated above, the paper focuses mainly on religious diversity, unity of faith, religious harmony and national stability. Among the diversities, diversity of faith is a major diversity. The paper tries to explore how religious diversities can be harmonised and the unity of faith be evolved and promoted in order to achieve greater degree of social and national stability. We may find that social and national stability is at the greater height when the religious diversities are respected and celebrated, no faith is marginalised, excluded and put against each other and no religious division exists. The cultural diversities in general and religious diversities is particular are needed because the diversities bring and add novelty to the totality of cultural heritage. The unity of faith manifests into the commonalities of religious diversities. The commonalities are the core or the fundamentals of all religions. They bind religions together and organize them into a cohesive cultural whole. They are to be considered as the universal religion which is beyond religions, although the religious diversity itself is the base structure of religious universalism. And therefore, religious diversity cannot not be overlooked, denied and marginalised because they are the basic sources of providing common universal values. For example, the values of love and compassion (*karuna*) exist in and preached by every religion. The universality of such values promotes unity of faith. They are accepted and practiced by all, irrespective of the differences in faith and religious practices. Similarly, the values of oneness, humanism, wholeness, belongingness, tolerance, helpfulness, civility, unity, equality, nationalism, brotherhood, respect to every faith, to every sacred symbols of faith and to every place of worship, respect to and protection of the motherland and adherence to truth, non-violence, cooperation and adjustment are some of the fundamental universal value parameters which are available in every faith and their validity cannot be disputed by any faith. They cut across all religions, castes, classes, and ethnic groups. They have the universal significance endowed with the power to unity faiths and cultural diversities.

Religious Universality

The core of all religions is the essence of all religions. It represents the totality of cultural heritage, referred here as the integrated cultural nationalism to be incorporated into and imparted through the text of knowledge in order to promote the unity of faith and cultural diversities. The commonalities of faith and of diverse cultural traditions have the powers to unite them. They consist of the teaching of scriptures, holy books and the messages of goodness, religious practices, rituals, customs, traditions and the common messages, the meaning of the pilgrimages and the visits of holy places. They foster fraternity and togetherness, assimilation of cultural identities, companionship and compassion, sacrifice and accountability, mutual tolerance and intra-faith harmony, sense of piety, eternal cleanliness and purity, confession and repentance, and the teaching of the theory of *karma*, good and evil, reward(heaven) and punishment (hell)and the accountability of personal and social conduct. Similarly, the teaching of the concept of life cycle (birth, death, and rebirth based on *karma* theory), the concept of charity (*zakat*)for the poor and needy and thus for the purification and justification of the wealth earned and the concept of eternal justice(universal trap of sin and crime committed in this existential world) are some of the examples of the kind of commonalities to be identified and abstracted to be incorporated in the school curriculum to impart the universality of religions in order to promote religious harmony and cultural unity. In fact, every religion gives us the message of peace, brotherhood and peaceful coexistence, message of freedom of expression and freedom of faith, worship and the choice of faith without any coercion, force and allurements. They are for the humanity, security and safety of life and property, for equality of men and women, for the acquisition of knowledge, dignity and privacy and for the protection against exploitation and oppression. When the religions sustain the belief that there is the creator and the sustainer of the universe, they promote the idea of the existence of the universe. When the religions place emphasis on offering regular and timely worship and prayers, they encourage the value of punctuality and time. Similarly, when the religions prescribe the act of *fast, brat, roza, charity, dan* and *zakat*, they give emphasis on the values of inner perfection, purification, obligation and growth (Ahmad,2014).

In this way, the package of the universality of religious diversities can be identified and the public legitimacy be drawn to be carried out by the processes of learning. This should be the first and the foremost objective of education. With this objective in mind, learning materials

must be restructured, especially in social sciences, mainly in the areas of history and literature texts of knowledge. The reading material must be highly selective. It is not necessary that the contents of the school textbooks should contain the whole truth. The selection of the truth to be incorporated into the texts of knowledge must maintain selectivity along with inclusivity. It is desirable that in such selection, some of the facts of clash and friction among territories, communities, religious and caste groups should be blurred over and disregarded in order to give greater space to the elements of cooperation, unity, love, compassion, oneness and similar other positive aspects of life and culture. The natural interest demands that the history text materials should be so prepared that the learners do not develop narrow sectarian loyalties but develop respect to and attachment with the entire cultural diversities, their richness and their contributions. The facts need not be distorted but the elements of conflict, clash, friction, hatred and disrespect must be eliminated in order to create a broader sense of oneness and not a narrow sectarian outlook and prejudices in the mind of the young learners against any community or group or culture which are to be preserved and respected (Nurullah and Naik, 1956). Since each region in India has its own unique and diverse tradition, the use of regional languages would be the most appropriate means of spreading and preserving regional traditions (Education Commission, 1964-66). The central and the state governments have to make efforts to develop regional languages along with Hindi as the link language. All the classics representing the plurality of Indian tradition need to be translated in the regional languages and a corpus of commonalities in the plurality of Indian traditions is to be created. This would be helpful in developing an all-India perspective, as well as, an understanding of regional diversities. The learners would appreciate the common literary heritage and when they share the same legends, myths and associations, they would respond to the commonality, to a common outlook and common feeling of oneness in spite of socio-regional differences. The medium of transmission is not a problem, the problem is how to arrive at the consensus on the commonalities of religious diversities in particular and the common contents of the totality of cultural heritage in general, and how to integrate them into the processes of learning being undertaken by various agencies and how to impart them to the learners.

Imparting Communalities of Religious Diversities

Our over-riding concern is the unity of faith, unity of cultural

traditions and appreciation for and respect to all diversities. The learners have to be properly exposed to the basic tenets of each faith and tradition. If they are not exposed to this, the sense of division of faith, cultural distance, lack of respect to faith, strangeness and hostility might develop in the mind of the learners. In such a situation, imparting common elements of religious diversity would serve as the control mechanism on religious division in particular and cultural fragmentation in general. It is because of this reason, imparting religious education, more specifically value-loaded education becomes the essential component of school curriculum. Religion is the root cause of both the cultural diversity, as well as, the cultural unity. This aspect should receive adequate space in schooling because it is not the teaching of religion as such but the teaching of the fundamentals of religions with the view to promote the universality of religions. This is beyond religion, although the base-structure of the universality of religion, universal appeal of religion or unity of faith is the religion itself. This kind of teaching would be based on the assumption that all the religions offer the same set of human values. Therefore, the diverse religious traditions need to be accepted, adopted, developed and promoted through both the formal and informal teaching-learning processes. The concept of multi-religiosity is to be accepted as the ground reality and it is from its inherent philosophy, the values of ethics and morality are drawn. The wholesome frame of curriculum has to be drawn consisting of skill-based activities, modern components of learning and religious-moral education with the focus on multi-religiosity and the commonalities of religions (universal religion) as the uniting force among the religions (Ahmad, 2014).

There are multiple agencies which can transmit cultural commonalities and promote holistic and plural cultural nationalism. In spite of the differences in the viewpoints, all the agencies are required to be value-free and neutral in their function to impart cultural commonalities. Only then the ideal of unity in diversity can be achieved but the rising trend of declining morality, value degeneration, singular faith dominance, faith-based rigidity and division, crime and violence, social insecurity and the poverty of culture indicate certain amount of malfunctioning on the part of the agencies. The requirement of value-neutrality from the agencies in performing the role of socializing the young generation for a desired social order is rather difficult to achieve but not impossible. Along with a number of informal agencies like the family, the neighbourhood, the mass media, the political groups and the leadership, the school is a formal, structured and controlled agency

to play an important role in this regard. Although, the standard of formal learning and its neutrality have also declined. The World Bank in its report (*Learning Poverty*, 2018) has pointed out that more than 50% learners suffer from learning poverty due to lack of quality teaching (Haq, 2019). The schooling process has to be more sensitive academically to impart the complex nature of the framework of cultural diversity and cultural unity. For this, socially sensitive, well trained and socially composite group of teachers are required. In spite of their attachment to specific group, culture and religion, they are supposed to be value-neutral because they have to act as the role-model of holistic cultural nationalism. The school can be very effective if it is supported by other agencies because there are challenges to schooling from other informal, as well as, formal agencies. All the agencies must understand the value of fostering the common cultural bonds among the people. The media can serve as an effective tool of transmission of universal values of various cultural and religious traditions, provided it is objective and value-free medium of transmission of information. It must avoid controversial cultural and religious issues because they might prejudice the mind of the recipients of the message. It should focus mainly on the core of the cultural and religious heritage in order to develop social cohesiveness, cultural amity, social stability, friendship and camaraderie among the people.

Among the agencies, the political parties and the leadership also play important roles in the promotion of social cohesiveness. The democratic system encourages diversity of political parties, ideologies and active participation. It also encourages debates, discussion, democratic consensus, right of every individual or group to establish institutions to conserve their respective culture and promote citizenship rights. These are the positive signs and the formal aspects of a modern polity but any system, single or multiple, is not independent of the society of which it is an integral part. Every formal aspect of political organization is linked with the informal aspects of the society. The informal aspects of the polity are relatively more powerful than the formal aspects of polity. A good relationship of informal and formal aspects of the polity is a good sign of civility and civilised form of governance where citizens, their views, aspirations and participation are taken into account. The informalised governance is a good form of governance, provided all the citizens are educated, cultured, rational, impersonal and civilised who can think beyond the social particularities of the society to which they belong. The system of governance is bound to be effected by its external social particularities of the society. They

are diverse and deeply rooted into the organic structure of the society. They are religious, socio-cultural and structural, representing our rich social heritage inherited from the past. They are endowed with power to reconstruct political processes as against the modern universalities of secular, rational, egalitarian, integrated, socially inclusive and cohesive elements of the society. The social particularities, as well as, the social universalities of the society externally affect the polity but the degree of their effects depends on which one is relatively more powerful. The particularistic elements of the tradition affect not only the democratic processes but also the behaviour of the masses and democratically elected leadership. The leadership takes them into account at the time of election and makes use of them for political mobilization to gain public support. The masses are politically useful even if it is for one day. There is reciprocal relationship between the social bases of exercising political franchise by the people to elect their representatives and the behaviour of the elected leadership. Socially, the role of the electorates and the role of the elected leadership complement each other. The social character of the leadership reflects the social character of the electorates and vice-versa.

The informal aspects of polity, mainly religious and caste (in addition to other social particularities like the tribe/race, status, gender, region, language, etc) and their use in politics is creating a lot of social tension in the society. The masses, as well as, the leadership are unable to get out of socially controversial issues which in fact constitute the basic informalised aspects of politics. There is no problem in using the informalised structures of politics to popularise the idea of glory of diverse cultural and religious traditions and their richness because they are endowed with the power of uniting and harmonizing diversities but the misuse of the informalised structures cannot be permitted because it will divide and disharmonize diversities, particularly the religious and caste identities. It is to be noted that the leadership represents not only the people but also the state and the country. The structure of the state/country is secular but the structure of the society is religious based on ascriptive factors. There should be no contradiction in the mind of the parliamentarians and the legislators in providing the leadership of the secular state and the religious society. When the controversial issues come into picture, the leadership is required to focus more on the universality and commonality of religions rather than indulging in petty religious controversies. They must set examples of universalities of faith and respect to faith, love and compassion, dignity and civility, cultural unity and harmony, tolerance and peaceful

co-existence. They must show the role model of such virtues of religious life before they expect the young generation to follow these virtues. In this way, the leadership would also have the critical role to play in educating the youth into the ideals of unity of faith and social solidarity. In educating them, religious learning should not be divorced from education because religion should not be taken as the opiate (a source of providing drug with opium to induce sleep & make physical & mental sensations dull) but as the nectar (a source of giving life and beauty to the society, like a delicious beverage) of the society. It can be used to create social harmony and social solidarity among the people. The Indian people would not like to see that their children are brought up in an irreligious formal and informal learning environments but the environment must be secular to impart multi-religiosity or common and universal core values of religions with the view to conciliate and unite religious diversities.

However, the religion as a nectar of the society is a powerful source of strengthening spirituality, morality, civility and integrity. It makes the society duty-bound, promotes stability and protects from value-degeneration but everything depends on how the religious learning, a complicated, serious and sensitive aspect, is being imparted. The agencies must work in a desired manner in taking up religious issues. If they are unable to discharge positive and coordinated function, it becomes all the more necessary not to impart religious learning at the early age. The studies have shown that the agencies focusing on religious aspects make the learners and the public alienated, prejudiced and biased, leading to fight among themselves on religious issues (Rajput, 2014). The multiple agencies can not be permitted to function in multiple ways. Their roles have to be standardised in order to have a perfect coordination among them. This is a necessary condition to achieve the goals of religious harmony and holistic cultural nationalism. Therefore, before launching the programme of religious learning with a view to promote unity of faith by imparting commonalities of sprawled religious and cultural diversities, we have to work to plan on several fronts. The imparting the idea of universality of religions, consisting of the common and universal core values, cannot be left to the school alone, although it plays the vital role but it must be supported by other agencies in its efforts to achieve unity of faith and social stability.

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