

Notes and Comments

**The Global Challenge for Inter-civilization Peace and Reconciliation**

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Conflict is natural to a human society. With the start of civilizations, societies have been confronted with problems of social inequality, disparities in the distribution of economic resources, inequalities in the social status, variations in political placement, natural differences of opinion, clash of egos and interests that have always potential of promoting and perpetuating discord at different levels of social discourse. But, human ingenuity has been able to find answers to many such problems and discover mechanism of managing and resolving some of these conflicts and thereby allowing relative peace to society. However, that did not mean the end of conflicts. In fact, many of the conflicts gained more serious proportion when, historically speaking some of these went beyond borders of a given society. History is replete with examples of bloody wars and disastrous confrontations among communities, kings, empires, countries, states and nations. The problem became serious during last few hundred years, when aggressive state nationalism is born.

It is combined with a new generation of weaponry capable of inflicting colossal damage to the adversaries. This was also followed by some of these European nation states going for a mad race of building and expanding empires into Asia, Africa and Americas. This mad race led the world to disasters of first and second world wars. Added to this in modern times, with the diffusion of small and medium level weapons, non-state private protest movements turned violent and became a source

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of public insecurity and emerged challenge to the given power hierarchies and the state systems that are operative in modern times.

After the breakdown of the former Soviet Union, Samuel Huntington developed a new thesis of “clash of civilizations” which maintained that the breakdown of the Soviet Union does not necessarily mean the west will remain unchallenged from the Islamic, Chinese and other civilizations. We have seen violent groups getting activated in number of regions, religion wise so constituted, that it seemed to reaffirm clashes along the civilizational fault lines. This culminated in the 9/11 and subsequent response in Afghanistan and Iraq. The situation got so confused and blurred that practically it occasionally was given colour of clash between faiths particularly by the dominant global powers lead by the former US President, George W Bush. Fingers started to be pointed towards the Muslims and Islam. Muslims were accused of being violent and emotionally surcharged, and mostly responsible for violence across the world. However, when we go deeper into the incidence of violence involving Muslims, it is easier to discern the political causes of these violent incidents. Most of these have objective political causes. In the vitiated atmosphere, the relation between communities deteriorated further and globally situation became bad and chaotic. Globally some sensible and concerned people started speaking in terms of bridging the gap between the religious communities and rebuilding relationship of trust and understanding between the communities. It is being increasingly realised that mankind cannot afford the continuous discord that only contributed to global uncertainties and universal insecurities. The US along with the support of its NATO allies failed to enforce peace on its own terms in Iraq and Afghanistan. These states continue to pay a heavy price for their intervention in the two states. This situation has forced the realisation that mankind cannot afford the continuous conflict along what was claimed to be the

civilisational fault lines.

As stated earlier, there has been the tendency of linking violence with Islam and Muslims. We as human beings tend to have a short memory. These days we see a lot of violence coming mainly from Muslims and think that probably it is rooted in the religion of Islam. We need to realize that even in the contemporary situations employment of violence has not been confined to Muslim community alone. There is violence happening in other communities as well. We have examples of extremely violent conflicts in Sri-lanka, Northeastern states and other Naxal infested areas in India, Northern Ireland, South Africa and several other parts of the African Continent and the Latin America within and among communities that are not Muslim. We have also forgotten the fact that severest violence during the previous few centuries occurred in Europe or in Asia and Africa at the hands of the Europeans. This included the destruction caused during the two great wars in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the rise of Fascism and the brutalities caused by Hitler. But we never say that the violence in Europe came from the religion of its people. We as historians try to trace the objective causes of this violence in Europe. Therefore, similarly today we also need to try to locate objective causes of contemporary violence and fanaticism even where Muslims get involved. We also need to realize that some of the causes of violence and extremism have been rooted in colonial legacy and contemporary practices of some powers acting on narrow view of their national interests and the vulgar way of pursuing them. Let us also keep in mind that Afghanistan and Iraq, which today seem to be infested by severe violence, were peaceful before external forces as Soviets during 1978/79 and the Americans in 2003 intervened in the two countries respectively without any legitimate reason. We also need to realize that Muslim world also does not constitute a unified whole. Muslim world is also plural in its constitution and responses. There is tremendous heterogeneity in the Muslims on account of the

race, levels of socio political and cultural development, languages, interests, methodologies and practices.

Even as Muslims we need to realize that the West is also not a single entity in politics and interests. We have seen that on the issue of the US invasion of Iraq, Europe by and large did not side with the United States. The EU is now in a quite different phase of peaceful and the collaborative living. We as social scientists should, therefore, look objectively as to why violence is happening in a certain situation. We should also not forget that there is plurality, both within the Muslim world and in the West. An important question for us to answer is that what are the objective causes of extremist ideas and behavior and how to address them? We should also stop categorizing and avoid putting all responses in one category. There is need to view each side with certain degree of empathy so that we are able to identify ways and means of addressing each other's concerns in the interest of the common good and for breaking the vicious circle of mistrust and violence. We also need to realize that there is strong need to overcome fanaticism and extremism and end of the discourse of violence within Muslims in the interest of the community's own good. This can be done by promoting the correct understanding of Islam in line with its emphasis on the moderation found in the tradition of the Prophet's teachings and the practice.

Let us also note that today there is also a universal tendency of demonizing all sorts of private non-state or anti-state violence little realizing that historically violence has helped in shaping the world that we are in. As said earlier conflict is natural to a human society as there always are objective causes within which it has been rooted. With the start of civilizations, societies have been confronted with problem of social inequality, disparities in the distribution of economic resources, inequalities in the social status, variations in political placement, natural differences of opinion, clash of egos and interests that have always had potential of promoting and

perpetuating discord at different levels of social discourse. History is also replete with examples when many, historically significant changes occurred due to the violent struggles. The American war of independence, the French revolution, the Bolshevik takeover, Algerian war of independence, the Chinese revolution, the Vietnamese resistance against Americans, the Bangladesh war of independence, Afghan resistance against the USSR and numerous other such violent public uprisings have helped in shaping the world for better. Most of these movements have been violent in character and enjoyed important element of external sympathy and support. Even today there are many situations, where change is very desirable but there is very little scope to bring it through peaceful means, like situation in Palestine, oligarchic Gulf monarchies which have scuttled all processes of the democratic transformation in that region. But, still we understand that in the contemporary situation use of violence will not be right strategy to adopt for a number of reasons.

Today's state compared to past is categorized as an all encompassing total state with tremendous coercive capacity unparalleled in human history, reinforced by efficient information and the communication technology. It is also because, particularly in post 9/11 context, anti-state private violence stands universally de-legitimized by dominant powers globally. This leaves any violent movement whatever legitimate and noble cause it might be pursuing, bereft of any moral, more so of material support. That allows the state with full jurisdiction to use its full coercive machinery to suppress any movement with whatever mass support, if it is able to successfully color it as violent. All such private violence in the contemporary world is universally dubbed as terrorism. Therefore, in today's world any movement for changing the *status-quo* needs to be led with tremendous care and high levels of intellectual sophistication and by means that are morally superior.

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overcome fanaticism and extremism and end of the discourse of violence within Muslims in the interest of the community's own good. This can be done by promoting the correct understanding of Islam and its emphasis on the moderation in the tradition of the prophet's teachings and the practice. We are faced with a lot of problems that need to be addressed. But to press for their solution we need to be creative and imaginative. Attempts are also being made to end this vicious circle of violent conflict. President Obama's Cairo speech in June, 2009 was an outcome of this realization. A new concept of an interfaith dialogue has gained global currency and has got the stamp from the United Nations. In this regard, this is historically vindicated that against the common prevalent notions, Islam has always stood for religious tolerance and interfaith understanding. Today we live in a world that is ridden by a culture of intolerance. Kashmir in spite last 20 years of turbulence has generally exhibited certain degree of human concern. There is something innately present in Kashmiri character for which it, in essence, remains repugnant to dehumanising violence and has not allowed crime and violence influence the general character of the society the way we have seen it happening in other societies in similar situations. Even in violence its people did not lose their human sensibilities completely. Compare to happenings in Pakistan on sectarian front and the kind of the brutalising violence in places like Gujarat, we as Kashmiris have always exhibited certain degree of civility in our conduct and behaviour.

Kashmir has always optimised the culture of interfaith harmony, peace and understanding in the cultivation of which, as it is generally believed, our *Sufi* and the *Rishi* Traditions have played a very important role. There is tremendous scope for building on this tradition of inter-cultural and inter-faith harmony. This is so particularly because Kashmir is a meeting point where four great religious traditions meet and extend beyond across stretches of land with continental proportions.

It is here in Kashmir that the contiguous Islamic tradition moves from valley in the north into Central Asia and in the west across Pakistan into Middle East and beyond into North Africa up to the extremes of Maghrib into Morocco as a contiguous stretch of land dominated by the Islamic faith. In the east Buddhist traditions spread from Ladakh, Tibet, China into South East Asia and towards east into extremes of the East Asia up to Japan inside the Pacific Ocean. Birth place of Sikh faith and the place of its largest concentration Punjab is linked to J&K in south. Hinduism stretches from Jammu, across India into the Indian Ocean into the Northern Sri Lanka and Mauritius. This is a privilege that hardly any other place can claim. It places responsibility in Kashmir to build on this tradition.

In our context there is need to focus on the Shaik-ul-Alam, his rich heritage in Kashmir with special reference to the different facets of *Rishi* movement, its message and the impact it has had on culture of tolerance and peaceful co-existence within the Kashmiri society. We also need to look into how we can build up on this kind of tradition in the context of growing mistrust among communities, both nationally and internationally and the newer challenges that modern man is confronted with various fronts that include the challenges to the environment. We may also try to discern the relevance of this tradition for global initiatives for interfaith dialogue and understanding as it is emerging a major concern of international community today. We need to note that in the face of growing mistrust and strife among various communities and countries both locally and globally, United Nations has launched a global initiative for promoting interfaith dialogue. In this regard it convened an international conference of various interfaith communities in November 2008 to mark this important initiative. We need to contribute our bit to building on global peace and reconciliation. But we also need to note that basis of durable peace and reconciliation can be founded only on an order that is Just and fair.