



One Day
National Seminar



National Foundation
for Communal Harmony

INTERFAITH DIALOGUE IN INDIA: CONCERNS AND CHALLENGES

National Foundation for Communal Harmony (NFCH), an autonomous body with the Ministry of Home Affairs promotes activities that highlight and strengthen the bonds of unity and affinity between different groups in the country and encourages activities which promote belief in the principles of non-violence in resolving disputes between different groups. Over the years, the Foundation on its own and in collaboration with various universities/colleges, civil society groups, NGOs etc. has organized several Programs like Conferences/Seminars/Symposiums, cultural events etc. to Promote inter-religious understanding and Interfaith Dialogue amongst different communities.

The human race is deeply driven and motivated by spirituality. These commonalities become apparent when different sacred texts are compared with regard to basic themes viz. the golden rule, prayer, character development, faith, love and compassion. India has a history of interfaith dialogue which was promoted and Propagated by Emperor Ashoka and Akbar, the Sufi Saints and civil society leaders. Each religion has contributed in strengthening interfaith relations. In present time, many challenges can effectively be met through interfaith dialogue.

The society and the nation have to maintain peace and social harmony for ensuring smooth and sustainable growth and development. Every religion offers insights, observations and instructions that are universally acceptable and helpful to the growth of the society. All religions inculcate values such as love, nonviolence, equality, justice, compassion and truth. The value system in religion is the soul while the rituals are the body. The people have to be convinced that there is something which is greater than our differences and distinctiveness, which binds us together. From all religious principles and writings people can derive benefit and this is possible when people realize the essence of all religions.

INTRODUCTION TO THE ACTIVITY

The Seminar on 'Interfaith Dialogue' aims at promoting a culture of interfaith understanding in the context of contemporary challenges, as part of a series of seminars on 'Interfaith Dialogue' that would look at the linkage between changing social structure in India in light of commonalities found in religions and the spirit of imparting ethical values among individuals. Through these interactions, it is intended to invite religious representatives, scholars, professionals, academicians and institutions which are engaged in spreading the message of peace and harmony through various means. Further these symposiums would seek to capture emergent issues in respective communities.

The proposed Interfaith Dialogue will look at the role of religions in promoting peace, social cohesion, integration and mutual understanding. In the context of the nation, the Symposium will look at initiatives which promote these aspects of religions and how these could be replicated in day to day life. The Foundation hopes that this initiative will contribute in getting us closer for a peaceful, stable, secure and prosperous India.

The aim of the dialogue would be to look at mainstream religions and take it in the larger public discourse. Moving away from the narrow perception of religion, it is important to look from a broader political, sociological and community context. This is a humble initiative to deliberate on the impact of different religions in promoting peace and communal harmony.

The overarching goal of the symposium, while deliberating on the above perspectives, would be to showcase the multiple religious traditions in India. It would also deliver the altruistic content of religion through the expression of free spirit of human being and spirituality of love.

PROGRAMME OBJECTIVES

- To create an environment where people help prevent spread of violence at the time of communal disturbances, and create understanding the actual role of a common man to make peace at the time of disturbance;
- To ensure active participation of local communities realize their duties and responsibilities towards maintaining communal harmony;
- To strengthen the sense of unity in diversity amongst citizens of the country and to actively participate in Communal Harmony activities;
- To understand and disseminate the contribution of various religions in promoting peace and communal harmony;

FOCUS AREAS OF PROGRAMME

- To motivate students, youth leaders, scholars and academicians;
- To actively motivate the youth to contribute in peace building process;
- To understand and appreciate the salient features of all religions and to have a better understanding of the teachings of all religions;
- To appreciate and disseminate teachings of all religions for universal peace and brotherhood;

THEMES OF THE PROGRAMME

- Challenges and Opportunities as prescribed in religious teachings;
- Religion as an important tool for good governance;
- Importance of Religious Traditions in contemporary Indian societies
- Promoting leadership in maintaining religious traditions for a tolerant, mature society;
- Active participation of Youth in promoting communal harmony.

ON INTERFAITH DIALOGUE IN INDIA: CONCERNS AND CHALLENGES

13TH September, 2019

Organized By

Centre for Study of Social Exclusion and Inclusive Policy, Faculty of Social Sciences
Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi



Sponsored By

National Foundation for Communal Harmony (NFCH)
An Autonomous Organization
Ministry of Home Affairs
Government of India
New Delhi

Venue

Sambodhi Sabhagar, Samta Bhawan
Faculty of Social Sciences
Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi

About BHU

Banaras Hindu University (BHU) is a central university which was established by Bharat Ratna Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya in 1916. It is one of the largest residential universities in Asia, with over 30,000 students and includes students from over 34 nations. Its objectives is to promote learning of science and technology along with knowledge of ancient Shastras and build character of youth by blending religion and ethics as an integral part of education. It is one of the oldest modern universities of the country rated among the top five educational institutions in India. BHU is organized into 4 institutes and 14 faculties (streams) and more than 140 departments.

About the Centre

The Centre was established in the year 2008 under the XI plan. It is with pride to state that this Centre has been one of the few Centers in the country that defended itself in UGC and was approved for the continuation of its grant (recently held meeting in the UGC, New Delhi) The centre distinct emphasis has been to comprehend the different types of social, cultural and economic exclusions and link them with the borderer parameters of social exclusions accepted the social sciences. In way, the centre has objective of studying and researching the various types of conventional and fresh one, both in theoretical understanding and in empirical expositions.

The socially excluded groups in social sciences by and large have been treated merely a category or an identity that refers to a group of people, a cluster of castes, religions, gender or ethnic groups who identify themselves as weaker sections of society. It has been found that social exclusion is not a singular experience. What holds the socially excluded group together is the structural fact that they have all been historically socially excluded, that is, subjected to exclusion of varying degrees and the rejection of their identity. For example, Dalit is related to identity and at the same time is anti-identity (The rejection of ascriptive identity). However, with the passage of time and across the space, the modern academia, with the spurt in ontological and epistemological perspectives on identity formation and historical facts, views that social exclusion is not a permanent state of

being but a temporary one; a state determined by the politics of the contemporary times. In the humanities and social sciences and the academic in general, the exclusion of socially depressed groups in state funded institutions despite the policy of positive discrimination continues and remains inadequately addressed. The *subaltern studies* enterprise has yet to admit a dalit historian in its charmed circle. Such structured exclusion leads to a significant number of scholars making Dalit, minorities, women and disabled the subject of their research and documentation. However, there are a lot of limitations in the theoretical claims that have been made on behalf of the socially excluded groups by such scholars and the concretized people. Once, that is, Social Exclusion Studies would emerge as an academic discipline, a social exclusion perspective would become a space that the mainstream can seek to occupy and social exclusion would settle into becoming yet another approach for an understanding of the world around us. Thus, in the backdrop of this emerging field for a historical and scientific exploration, those keen on a purposive, progressive politics must be especially alive to this scenario since it threatens to replicate structures of discrimination and exclusion. The Centre is currently running M. Phil. and Ph.D. in subaltern Studies course.

Aims and Objectives of the Centre:

Banaras Hindu University is establishing this Centre with the following aims and objectives:

- To start a two-year Post-Graduate Course entitled “*Master of Arts in Exclusion Studies*”. This course will focus on the nature and dynamics of myriad forms of discrimination and exclusion related to caste, tribes, gender, disabilities, religion, art, literature and media as well as on its various dimensions, i.e. constitutional, legal, socio-political, and economic in regard to the inclusive policy.
- To start M. Phil and Ph.D. courses in “*Subaltern Studies*”. At the M. Phil level, the Centre has proposed to orient the seekers of such courses about the theoretical and methodological perspectives in the area of social

exclusion and inclusive policy; at the Ph.D. level, the Centre would focus, apart from theoretical and ontological understanding, on the development of the empirical researches in the aforesaid area.

- To promote researches, extension and action programmes towards the theoretical and empirical maturity in comprehending the problems of socially excluded groups. Against this perspective, the students and the faculty of the Centre will be in a position to formulate policies in order to protect the rights of the exploited masses of our society. This exercise will also help the state in its functionality to eradicate the problems pertaining to social exclusion.
- To promote the networking with the similar institutions, Centres and organizations in order to sharpen the perspective on social exclusion.
- To organize the regular lecture series, seminars, symposia and workshops where the scholars will be drawn from the various disciplines, management studies and social sciences as well as political and social leadership and media.
- To organize outreach community programmes on aspects related to social exclusion with the purposeful utilization of PRA and RRA techniques and other community based surveys.

About Varanasi

Varanasi also known as Kashi and is one of the oldest living cities in the world. It is considered to be the holiest pilgrimages of Hindus which is located between Varuna and Assi rivers. It is the epitome of ancient Indian culture, multifarious legends and is believed to be situated on the Trishula of Lord Shiva. People from different parts of India/abroad visit Varanasi for pilgrimage, self-discovery and attainment of Moksha. The holy Ganges, the immortal ghats, Ganga Aarti, Kashi Vishwanath Temple, Sankat Mochan, Sarnath, Bharat Kala Bhavan and many other nearby places of tourist importance have always enthralled and mesmerized to visitors. Varanasi is also known for its rich tapestry of music, arts, craft, education and medical facilities. Varanasi is renowned since ages for Banarasi Silk Sarees, Silk brocades, wooden toys, Banaras pan and carpets.

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