

A Report of the National conference on "Importance of Inter-Religious Understanding: Its Implications for Mankind" organised by the **Institute of Objective Studies** in collaboration with Magadh University, Gaya on September 24-25, 2016

IOS-Magadh 'Varsity interfaith seminar

September 24-25, 2016 at Magadh University in Bodhgaya, Bihar



H. E. Ram Nath Kovind (in Centre), the then Governor of Bihar and now President of India



H. E. Ram Nath Kovind, Governor of Bihar delivers his views

Download: [Speech of H. E. Ram Nath Kovind, Governor of Bihar on 25-09-2016](#)



Lt. Gen. RK Sharma, army headquarters, New Delhi



**Swami Agnivesh, President of Bandhua Mukti Morcha
and a prominent Arya Samaj leader**



Inaugural Session

A two-day national seminar on "Importance of Inter-Religious Understanding: Its Implications for Mankind" jointly organised by Forum for Inter-religious Understanding, Institute of Objective Studies (IOS) and Deptt. of Buddhist Studies & Directorate of Distance Education, Magadh University in Bodhgaya, concluded on September 25, 2016. The deliberations that started on September 24 saw the convergence of religious leaders from six main religions who unequivocally underscored the need for the creation of a congenial atmosphere for peaceful co-existence, harmony, mutual respect and tolerance.

In his inaugural speech, he held that God is one, but He is called by several names. We fight among ourselves because we err in understanding Him. He said that the cause of the problem of misunderstanding among different religions were the rituals and ceremonies that were performed in the name of religion. All of us are creatures of the same God, yet we nurture the idea of being separate entities. Nobody knew where this idea came from, he wondered.

He maintained that while Gautam Buddha spread the message of love and compassion, Islam praised God as "*Rabb al Alameen*" (Nurturer of the worlds).

Though our earth is equal to the minutest part of a rice grain in the universe, we cannot remain united. Laying emphasis on the unity of all religions, he said that it was resolved to form a Dharma Sansad (religious parliament) seven years ago to foster inter-religious unity. Commenting on the evils that were plaguing our society, he observed that consumption of liquor was one of them, leading to the disintegration of social order. He called for a united fight against liquor consumption and freeing society from this scourge. Praising Bihar Chief Minister, Nitish Kumar for enforcing prohibition in the state from April 1 last, he termed it as a positive and courageous step. He said that in Islam, drinking is assumed as the fountain-head of all evil. Condemning gender bias he said that we claim to be a predominantly religious country, but sons are always preferred over daughters. He deplored that cases of lakhs of female foeticide were reported every year in the country. Underlining the need for inter-caste marriage, he suggested that inter-caste marriage fairs be organised every year to put an effective curb on casteism. He also pleaded for a common minimum programme for religions to follow.



The vice-chancellor of Magadh University, Prof. Md. Ishtiaq, in his welcome address held that today's world was faced with problems like communalism, nepotism, intolerance, yawning gap between poverty and wealth, etc. It was against this backdrop that a two-day national seminar was planned to identify these problems and seek their solution in a religious perspective. He was elated that the seminar was deliberating on such a serious issue in the land of Mahatma Buddha who spread the message of peace, brotherhood, goodwill, forbearance and cooperation.

He said that it was prayer that was essential for the peace of mind. Lauding the role of the Institute of Objective Studies in cherishing human values and finding ways of virtue, he said that this was the first partnership of the university with the IOS. India was a country where many religions were flourishing without hindrance and we were duty bound to take the spirit of mutual understanding among various religions further.

He lamented that though the Indian Constitution had guaranteed the right to equality and freedom to the citizens of the country in order to strengthen national integration, certain vested interests were busy working against brotherhood and striking at social harmony. Holding that social harmony pre-supposed prosperity, he said that religious heads had given a fillip to peace and goodwill. He expressed the confidence that the confluence of religious leaders would herald a new dawn.



In his presidential remarks, the Chairman of IOS, Dr. Mohammad Manzoor Alam informed that the institute was completing 30 years of its existence. Associating himself with the views of Swami Agnivesh on prohibition, he insisted that the All India Milli Council had discussed the issue in detail at its Bengaluru session where the Swami was also present. He opined that while intellectuals conceived ideas, it was the universities which were tasked with reaching them to the common people.

"We have one of the finest Constitutions of the world, but it is not being implemented in accordance with its spirit. Similarly, laws exist, but are not being properly enforced to maintain law and order", he regretted. He hoped that the clouds forming at the national seminar would rain over the world spreading the message of tolerance, goodwill, love and respect for other's religions. In order to perpetuate the memory of the seminar, he urged the vice-chancellor to plant a sapling on the university campus. He also suggested the setting up of a forum for religious understanding for promoting mutual goodwill.

The seminar was formally opened with the lighting of a lamp by all the religious heads present on the occasion.



Addressing the delegates, Acharya Dr Lokesh Muni of the Ahimsa Vishwa Bharti, New Delhi, pointed out that similar to different types of pollution, the ideological pollution called terrorism, too, had taken in its stride the areas stretching from Syria to Afghanistan. Religion only strengthened bonds and never broke. He felt it strongly that the country would not transform unless the outlook of society underwent a change. In a democracy, diversity of views was essential for development, he said.



Vice-chancellor of the Central University of Tibetan Studies, Sarnath, Varanasi, Prof. GN Samten, held that Indian culture was the oldest and the concept of respect for all religions was inherent in it. This offered an example for the rest of the world. The languages of the religions might be different, but the basic idea remained the same. What was needed most was to promote friendship, brotherhood and love in temples, mosques, churches and gurudwaras, he remarked.



Former chairman of PUCL, Bihar, Father Philip Manthra said that a man commanded respect since his birth which continued till death. This respect had been outlined by our Constitution. Since all religions stood for human welfare, Bodhgaya should serve as a starting point, he said.



Jain Sadhvi, Veerayatan, Rajgir, Upadhyay Sadhvi Yashaji called for inter-religious efforts to mould people towards tolerance. She said that no religion was ill-disposed to other faiths and hence, we should take forward the divinity of religions by treading the path of compassion, love, fraternity and harmony.

The President, All India Ramacharya Mantralaya Vishnupad, Gaya, Pandit Ramacharya defended the Sanatan Dharma by saying that it did not hold a critical view of other religions.

Referring to the custom of *pind daan* (for the peace of ancestors' souls), he said that those who converged on Gaya for *pind daan* also contributed to the local economy. Local population benefited from the pilgrims who undertook the journey to Gaya every year.



Former professor, department of religious studies, Punjab University, Chandigarh, Dr. BS Siddhu emphasised that Guru Nanak Dev, Mahatma Buddha, Swami Vivekananda and Dr Mohammad Iqbal stood for unity in diversity.



Lt. Gen. RK Sharma, army headquarters, New Delhi, held that goal of all the religions was one, but the ways differed. We should find a common path. He said that like other religions, army was also a religion where followers of different religions worked together as a single family. Defending the country was their religious duty as for soldiers country came first and other things later. He said that the military was the only organisation where all-religion prayers were conducted and soldiers professing different faiths visited them.

He suggested that all-religion places should be constructed by religious leaders unitedly in order to promote tolerance among themselves. He also said that the news channels should be asked to compulsorily show video clips on religious tolerance. He felt that the media could play a constructive role in nurturing the idea of tolerance and communal harmony.



President, Gurudwara Management Committees, Gaya, Sardar Karnail Singh also stressed the need of unity among all the religions.



The chancellor of the Integral University and Principal, Nadwatul Ulema, Lucknow, Maulana Saeedur Rahman Azmi, observed that Allah created man so that he could benefit from the earth and extend those benefits to others. He divided people into different communities, so that they could recognise and love each other. Referring to the Qur'an, he said that the greatest among the human beings was one who recognised his Creator. Man was the most respectable among all creatures. All of us were one because we had a common mother and father. The solution to the problems facing us today lay in coming closer to each other. We must learn to trust each other, he added.



The Secretary General, IOS, Prof. ZM Khan, while outlining the activities of the Institute, said that it was engaged in formulating plans for the future. This included seminal research on epistemology and uplift of weaker sections, especially Muslims. He maintained that the Institute also commissioned researchers for conducting surveys on various subjects. Besides, the Institute published books on various topics. More than 300 books had been published by the Institute. Seminars and symposia on burning topics were regularly organised by the Institute. Three books – *Introduction to Sociology: An Islamic Perspective*, *Sociology in Islamic Perspective: Selected Readings* written by Prof. AR Momin and *Shiksha Dwara Musلمانon ka Sashaktikaran* by Prof. Akhtar Siddiqui, published by the IOS, were released on the occasion. A vote of thanks was proposed by dean, faculty of science, Magadh University, Prof. NK Shastree.



Bussiness Session-I

The first session was devoted to "Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism, Christianity, Jainism and Sikhism." This session was chaired by Prof. Mohsin Usmani Nadwi, former dean, English and Foreign Languages

University, Hyderabad and Prof. DA Gangadhar, professor and former head, deptt. of philosophy and religion, Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi.

While Dr Rajeev Ranjan Sinha, former head, deptt. of Sanskrit, Sampurnanand Sanskrit University, Varanasi, spoke on Hinduism, secretary-general Islamic Fiqh Academy, New Delhi, Maulana Khalid Saifullah Rahmani, explained the tenets of Islam; Dr. AAB Gyaneshwar, chief monk, Kushinagar Myanmar Temple, UP and Dr. U Kundala of Nalanda University enlightened the audience on Buddhism. While Father U Lawrence, president, Jeevan Sangam, Bodhgaya, elaborated on Christianity and Prof. NK Shastree, spoke on Jainism, Col. Dalvinder Singh Grewal, Desh Bhagat University, Punjab, spoke on Sikhism.



Bussiness Session-II

The second session on "Inter-religious Understanding" presided over by Swami Agnivesh, focused on religious understanding. While Col. Dalvinder Singh Grewal, Desh Bhagat University, Punjab, presented a paper on "A Study into development of inter-faith dialogue by Guru Nanak", Founder Director, Institute of Harmony and Peace Studies, New Delhi, Dr. MD Thomas, spoke on "Golden Rule – A Shared Culture of Ethics". Prof. Mohsin Usmani Nadwi, presented a paper on "*Musalman Aur Hindu Mazhab ki Mutaleiyati Riwayat*". Secretary, International Buddhist Council of Bodhgaya, Kiran Lama and Secretary, Inter-faith Forum, Bodhgaya, Dr. Azmat Hussain also explained their viewpoints.



Bussiness Session-III

The third session of the first day on "Inter-faith Understanding and Peace", was preside over by Prof. Ishtiyaque Danish, former head of the deptt. of Islamic Studies, Jamia Hamdard, New Delhi. Dr. SB Singh, Nalanda, and Prof. Hamid Naseem Rafiabadi, former director, SH Institute of Islamic Studies, University of Kashmir, spoke on "Muslims' Understanding of World Religions: A Comparative Study". Ven. Bhikku Sumanapala, presented his paper on "Buddhism and Human Rights". Prof. Obaidullah Fahad, deptt. of Islamic Studies, Aligarh Muslim University, discussed "Muslim Understanding of Hinduism."



Bussiness Session-IV

The fourth session on the second day focused on the "Prospects of Inter-religious Understanding and the Indian Constitution". It was chaired by the vice- chancellor, Central University of Kashmir, Prof. Mehrajuddin Mir. While Dr Mukesh Kumar presented his paper on "Religiosity and Indian Constitution", Dr. Saswati Mutsuddy of the University of Kolkata and Dr. Bela Bhattacharya of Kolkata spoke on "The Glorious Buddhist Women of Rajgaha". Dr. Manish Sinha of the deptt. of History, Magadh University and

Dr. Tarika Kumari, Rashtriya Sanskrit Sansthan concentrated on "*Mahila Mukti Ke Prerna Srot Buddha: Ek Drishti.*" Dr. Arvind Bhattacharya from Kolkata also spoke on the theme.



Bussiness Session-V

The fifth session focused on "Inter-faith Dialogue and Human Rights Violation" was presided over by Lt. General RK Sharma. Speakers in the session included: Prof. DA Gangadhar, who presented a paper on "Inter-religious Understanding and Dialogue for Peace", Dr. Aquil Ahmad, asstt. professor, department of philosophy, AMU, Aligarh, who presented a paper on "Engaging Youth in Inter-faith Understanding and Communal Harmony", Dr. Saw. Htutu Sandar (Myanmar), deptt. of Buddhist Studies, Magadh University, who presented a paper on "My Experiences with Universal Brotherhood", Dr. Buddhadev Bhattacharya, Nalanda University presented a paper on "Inter-religious Dialogue and Indian Cultural Legacy of Buddhism. Dr. SK Jain, deptt. of religion, BHU, Varanasi and Dr. SB Singh, NavNalanda Mahavihara, Nalanda, also spoke on the theme.



Bussiness Session-VI

The sixth session discussed "Inter-Religious Dialogue in the Indian Context". This was presided over by Prof. Hamid Naseem Rafiabadi, Md. Sirajul Islam, head deptt. of Philosophy, Viswa Bharti, Shantiniketan, presented his paper on "Dara Shikoh and Inter-Religious Understanding" and Dr. Md. Habib, associate professor, dept. of Religious Studies, Punjabi University, Patiala spoke on "The Social Implications of the Qur'anic Approach to Interfaith Understanding". Nanak Singh Nishtar, president, International Sikh Centre for Inter-faith, Hyderabad, discussed "Sikhism and other Religions."



Bussiness Session-VII

The seventh session was devoted to "Need for Inter-religious Understanding". This was chaired by Prof. Madhumita Chattopadhyay, Jadavpur university, Kolkata. Dr. Sibtos Bandyopadhyay, professor of political science, Vivekananda Mahavidyalaya, Hooghly, presented a paper on "Deepening democracy are the most essential criterion for inter-religious understanding and promoting humanity", Dr. Nripendra

Kumar Srivastava, deptt. of history, Magadh University presented a paper on "Inter-religious Understanding in Practice: A study of Akbar's policy of sulh-i-kul". Prof. Ishteyaq Danish and Prof. ZM Khan also spoke on the theme.



The eighth session was devoted to "Global Harmony". Prof. NK Shastree was in the chair with Dr. Pravat Kumar Dhal, Member, Global Harmony Association and head of the department of education, Magadh University, presenting his paper on the topic. Prof. Manoranjan K Singh, HoD, deptt. of mathematics, Magadh University also spoke on the theme.



The ninth session was devoted to "International Fraternity". Prof. Bela Bhattacharya, University of Kolkata presided over the session. The speakers in the session included: Phrawiwat Hongsen (Thailand), Ms. Truong Thi Ngoc Anh, Vietnamese scholar, presented a paper on "Importance of Inter-religious Understanding: Its implications for mankind", Dr. Vishwajit Kumar NavNalanda Mahavihara, Nalanda,

presented a paper on "*Dharm aur uska swaroop: Dhampad ke vishes paripekshya mein*". Dr. RKP Singh, NavNalanda Mahavihara, Nalanda also spoke on this theme.

The valedictory session was addressed by the governor of Bihar and the chancellor of the university, Ram Nath Kovind as chief guest. In his address, the governor made special mention of the booklet titled "Messages of Peace", brought out by the Magadh University. He said that the letter 'I' was especially important because it was common to all the six religions – Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism, Sikhism, Islam and Christianity, mentioned in the booklet. He insisted that 'I' symbolised unity among all these religions which was so essential for national integration. One character of each of all religions together thus made "INDIAN".

He cautioned people against religious radicalism which posed a danger to the unity of the country. Referring to the Right to Religious Freedom enshrined in the Indian Constitution, he said that Dr. BR Ambedkar wanted religion to work as science did. Knowledge could best be acquired by following religion and propriety. Commenting on Articles 25, 26, 27 and 28 of the Constitution, he explained that the state was secular and there would be no discrimination against anybody on the basis of caste and creed. Even parliament had been barred from imposing a particular religion on the people.

Quoting the noted Hindi poet, Ramdhari Singh Dinkar, he said that Indian culture was not like grains collected by ants, but it was like honey collected by bees which benefited all. He noted that unity in diversity was the hallmark of India's strength. Whether they were Krishna, Jesus Christ or the Prophet (PBUH), all of them possessed divinity. He pointed out that the views expressed at the seminar were not new, as the saints of Hindu Nirguna stream and sufi saints had already spread the message of religious tolerance, affection and brotherhood. But, what was needed was to create understanding and establish dialogue between different sects, he said. He made a plea for dialogue not only between two religions, but also among all religions.



The vice-chancellor, Prof. Md. Ishtiaq, hoped that the views expressed in the seminar would go a long way in taking the message of peace, goodwill and brotherhood to every nook and corner of the country. He informed that a total of 50 research papers on nine different topics were presented by the scholars at the two-day national seminar.



IOS Chairman Dr. Mohammad Manzoor Alam, while spelling out the purpose of the seminar, said that religious leaders, intellectuals and scholars had gathered to think over religious intolerance and confrontation in society and find ways to put a stop to them. He asked them to form a strong chain, the links of which must be so strong as not to let the country weaken.



Prof. ZM Khan expressed satisfaction that the purpose of the seminar had been achieved. He read out the three-point resolution unanimously adopted by the delegation. The resolution read:

1. Keeping in view the successful handling of the subject and the display of organisational capabilities of involved organisations, it is felt that more efforts should be made to continue with this practice on mutually-agreed terms by the parties.
2. The Institute of Objective Studies and the Magadh University may mutually agree to cooperate in

granting funds to research/survey projects, scholarships and exchange of scholars on the basis of prescribed terms and conditions.

3. This conference emphatically proposes to keep women and youth studies in the priority areas of research design undertaken by both the parties. These bodies would cooperate in mutually agreed areas.



A view of audience

A Report of the International conference on "Towards Human Understanding through Dialogue" organised by the Institute of Objective Studies at New Delhi on October 24-26, 2008

TOWARDS HUMAN UNDERSTANDING THROUGH DIALOGUE

Leaders of major faiths, intellectuals and public figures build a consensus on working together to reduce tensions and promote human understanding, writes AU ASIF.



L- R: Shankaracharya Onkaranand Sarswati, Onkar Dham, New Delhi, Mahant Janamjei Sharanji, President, Shri Ram Janambhumi Mandir Nirman Nyas, Ayodhya, Mr. K Rahman Khan, Deputy Chairperson, Rajya Sabha, Justice A. M. Ahmadi, Former Chief Justice of India, Dr. Mohd. Manzoor Alam, Chairman, IOS, New Delhi, Rev Baddegama Samitha Thera, chief priest, Rev. Baddegama Buddhist Temple, Columbo (Sri Lanka), Gurtej Singh, retired IAS official from Chandigarh (Punjab), Dr M D Thomas, National Director, Commission for Religious Harmony, CBCI, New Delhi

INAUGURAL SESSION

It was a unique occasion. The representatives and experts of different faiths as well as other scholars and social activists gathered on October 24-26, 2008 at New Delhi's famous India Islamic Cultural Centre (IICC) in response to a call by Institute of Objective Studies (IOS), a well known think tank; IOS Centre for Arabic and Islamic Studies; and Universal Peace Foundation (UPF) to interact and discuss seven issues under the central theme "Towards Human Understanding through Dialogue". The three-day international conference attracted the attention of thinking persons because this was the first ever serious effort of its kind in the Indian context, providing an opportunity to understand each other through dialogue. IOS Chairman Dr M Manzoor Alam, who conceptualized the central theme, exhorted the participants, particularly the youth, to come out and play a pivotal role in the fight against all kinds of terrorism and the process of dialogue.



L - R : Justice A.M. Ahmadi, Former Chief Justice of India, Dr. Mohd. Manzoor Alam, Chairman, IOS, New Delhi, Rev. Baddegama Buddhist Temple, Columbo (Sri Lanka)

The participants included Shankaracharya Onkaranand Saraswati, Shri Shri Shri Shiva Murthy Sharanaru, Mahant Janamjey Sharan, Swami Tatgatananda Jee Maharaj, Swami Agnivesh, Dr M M Verma, and Prof Ratna Basu from **Hinduism**; Dr Gurtej Singh and Dr B S Siddhu from **Sikhism**; Rev Baddegama Samitha Thera, Prof H P Gangnegi, Prof G N Samten and Prof Sanghasen Singh from **Buddhism**; Swami Dharmanand, Sudeep Jain and Dr Veer Sagar Jain from **Jainism**; Father Dominique Emanuel and Dr M D Thomas from **Christianity**; Maulana Abdullah Mughaisi, Maulana Sultan Ahmed Islahi, Prof Mohsin Usmani, Prof Saud Alam Qasmi, Prof Hamid Nasim Rafiabadi, Tauqeer Alam, Mufti Zahid Ali Khan, Dr Ishtiyaque Danish, Sufi Jeelani and Prof Ali Mohammed Naqvi from **Islam**.

The star attraction was **Prof Samir Qasim Fakhro**, an internationally reputed ideologue and Vice Chancellor, Arab Open University, Bahrain. There were also representatives from Kuwait's Awqaf and Islamic Affairs Ministry---**Mohammed Umar Al Qinaie** and **Mohammed Al Umar**.



L - R : Shankaracharya Onkaranand Saraswati, Onkar Dham, New Delhi, Mr. Sirajuddin Qureshi, President India Islamic Cultural Centre, New Delhi, Mahant Janamjey Sharanji, President, Shri Ram Janambhumi Mandir Nirman Nyas

Besides, a number of scholars and social activists were too present on the occasion. Islamic scholar

and Jamaat-e-Islami Hind Ameer **Maulana Syed Jalaluddin Umri** attended the inaugural session while Rajya Sabha Deputy Chairperson **K Rahman Khan** was present in the inaugural and valedictory sessions. League of Arab States ambassador HE Dr Ahmed Salem Al Wahishi Ambassador, League of Arab States Mission too expressed his views in a session.

Inaugurating the three-day conference on October 24, **Mahant Janamjey Sharanji, President, Shri Ram Janambhumi Mandir Nirman Nyas, Ayodhya**, said "our blood is of one colour and we all are one. We should live peacefully together." Warning those playing the mandir-masjid card, he said Ramjanambhumi was a national property and it was not an issue and the solution was that "we should respect each other's feelings and sentiments." He declared that humanity was the biggest religion. Agreeing with him, **Shankaracharya Onkaranand Saraswati, Onkar Dham, New Delhi** said Islam stood for peace and harmony and those who tried to link it with terrorism, actually didn't know it.



L - R : Dr M D Thomas, National Director, Commission for Religious Harmony, CBCI, New, Swami Tatgatananda Jee Maharaj, Secretary, Ram Krishna Mission, Patna (Bihar), Prof. Sanghasen Singh

Swami Tatgatananda Jee Maharaj, Secretary, Ram Krishna Mission, Patna (Bihar) said that a human being had to be free of one's biological sphere and come out for dialogue to reach towards the goal of harmony and peace. He further added that every human being was equal in the eyes of the Almighty.

Gurtej Singh, retired IAS official from Chandigarh (Punjab), who represented the Sikh community in the conference, emphasized the need of a dialogue for which Guru Nanak himself visited different parts of the world.

Rev Baddegama Samitha Thera, chief priest, Baddegama Buddhist Temple, Columbo (Sri Lanka), said Buddhism was too for a dialogue among different faiths. He said that Gautam Buddha was of the view that there was no race other than a human race.

Swami Dharmanand, Sadhna Kendra, New Delhi, who represented the Jain community, averred such event really provided an opportunity for the followers of different religions to come closer.

Dr M D Thomas, National Director, Commission for Religious Harmony, CBCI, New Delhi stated that dialogue was the core value of human life. It was a two-way process and we should see each other as our reflection, he added. "Everybody has got an individual identity, but we also have to share multiple identities. The individual is not confined to a temple or a mosque or any other place of worship and he is everywhere," Thomas said.



L - T : Mr. Michael Macy Counsellor, Cultural Affairs Office American Embassy, New Delhi, H.E.Dato' Tan Seng Sung High Commissioner Malaysian High Commission, New Delhi, Mr.Harold Adlai Agyeman , Minister Counsellor Ghana High Commission, New Delhi, H.E.Mr.Osama Musa Ambassador, Embassy of the State of Palestine, New Delhi. Moulana Sufi Jeelani, Ajmer

Maulana Abdullah Mughaisi, President, All India Milli Council, opined that the need of the hour was to come out on the streets for a united fight against terrorism. "A basic principle of Islam is that you stop the zaalim (oppressor) from tormenting the mazloom (oppressed)," he said.

Sirajuddin Quraishi, President, India Islamic Cultural Centre, said the Treaty of Hudaibiya was before the humanity as a milestone in the world of dialogue.

According to him, the dialogue has, however, assumed importance particularly after 9/11.

K Rahman Khan, Deputy Chairperson, Rajya Sabha, said IOS deserved compliments for bringing leaders of different faiths at a common platform.

Earlier, **Dr M Manzoor Alam**, in his welcome address, said in the present situation there was no alternative other than a dialogue among different faiths.

In his presidential address, **former Supreme Court Chief Justice A M Ahmadi** said the process of a dialogue was the only way-out to extricate the Indian society which was pluralistic in nature from the

pervading chaos perpetuated by the virus of communalism. He averred India was an umbrella of multi-religious faiths where "we should live in peace and tranquility without transgressing and hurting the rights and beliefs of other religions".

He said: "The principle of fraternity as enunciated in the Preamble of Indian Constitution, which has not received attention as it needed, should be adhered to resolve disputes through dialogue and honouring the dignity of an individual and communities at large leading to unity and diversity." Earlier, **IOS Secretary General Prof Z M Khan** introduced the theme along with IOS.

BUSINESS SESSIONS

Presiding over on **October 25 the first business session** under the sub-theme "**Relevance and Dynamics of Dialogue in the 21st Century**", **Dr Samir Qasim Fakhro** said: "Our dialogue should have a common agenda while allowing every body or group sticking to its own identity and respect each other's faith. For this we need able leaders with grass-root connection, not leaders who have remote control followers."



L - R : Sardar Gurtej Singh, IAS (retd) from Chandigarh (Punjab), Prof M H Qureshi, former Profess of Geography, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, Dr. Samir Q. Fakhro Vice Chancellor, Arab Open University, Bahrain, Prof .A. K. Pasha, JNU, New Delhi

He said the leaders' role was very important but the problem was that the present leaders didn't have ability to understand the issues and reach people with a common agenda. A faith needed culture and tolerance, he added.

He also said that culture could unite people, not break them. According to him, when a good culture would come, marginalization and injustice would itself go and there would be equal opportunities for new generation everywhere.

Dr Fakhro averred good and able leaders could emerge only when good culture would be allowed to flourish. "You can contribute to your nation as a follower of your religion from your own way,"

asserted the internationally known scholar and educationist.

However, **Gurtej Singh, IAS (retd) from Chandigarh (Punjab)**, opined that the scenario for a dialogue in the 21st century India was grim but there was no alternative and prospects of it must be relentlessly promoted. In his view, this also called for a united effort by other nations and minorities, at least at the academic level, to pursue the aim of establishing a meaningful dialogue.

Prof M H Qureshi, former Professor of Geography, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, said there were three kinds of power---**power of intellect, power of economy and power of polity**. According to him, the power of intellect had a superior role to play, but the problem was that today it had disappeared and power of economy was dominating the scene with power of polity taking a back seat.

Dr A K Pasha was of the view that a dialogue should be done between two equal partners but in today's world it didn't happen. He also said there was no match between hegemony and dialogue. He said in each and every case whether it was of Afghanistan or Palestine, "we would have to ponder over the root cause".



L - R : Prof.Hamid Nasim Rafiabadi, Prof. Muhsin Usmani, Father Dominique Emanuel, Director-spokesperson, Delhi Catholic Archdiocese, Prof Ratna Basu, chairperson, Department of Sanskrit, Kolkata University, Prof M H Qureshi, former Professor of Geography, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, , Dr B S Siddhu, former Professor, Department of Religious Studies, Punjab University, Chandigarh (Punjab), Dr Veer Sagar Jain, Reader, Lal Bahadur Shastri Rashtriya Sanskrit Vidyapeeth, Delhi, Prof H P Gangnegi, Department of Buddhist Studies, University of Delhi, Sufi Jeelani

The second business session on "**Dialogue among Faith Communities for Peace and Justice (Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, Sikhism, Buddhism and Jainism)**" under the chairmanship of **Prof M H Quraishi, former Professor of Geography, JNU, New Delhi**, was lively. **Prof Ratna Basu, chairperson, Department of Sanskrit, Kolkata University**, representing Hinduism, opined that according to the Hindu scriptures, there was no religion like Hinduism.

Father Dominique Emanuel, Director-spokesperson, Delhi Catholic Archdiocese, representing Christianity, said his religion itself stood for love, peace and brotherhood and was always

in favour of a dialogue among different communities.

While referring to the sayings of Muslim Sufi Baba Fariduddin Ganjshakar, **Dr B S Siddhu, former Professor, Department of Religious Studies, Punjab University, Chandigarh (Punjab)**, representing Sikhism, averred Guru Granth Sahib's contents itself showed Sikhism's accommodation to other faiths.

Prof H P Gangnegi, Department of Buddhist Studies, University of Delhi, representing Buddhism, discussed the teachings of Gautam Buddha and dwelt in detail its attitude towards the followers of other faiths.

Dr Veer Sagar Jain, Reader, Lal Bahadur Shastri Rashtriya Sanskrit Vidyapeeth, Delhi, representing Jainism, said the basic teaching of this religion was nothing but to "live and let live other creatures". According to him, this philosophy showed much scope for dialogue different faiths.

Sufi Jeelani said dialogue among faith communities was the need of the hour and it was possible because all religions had some common points. **Prof Hameed Nasim Rafiabadi, S H Institute of Islamic Studies, University of Kashmir**, representing Islam, said the Holy Quran didn't condemn other faiths anywhere. According to him, there was a famous verse in this regard.

Agreeing with Prof Rafiabadi, **Prof Mohsin Usmani, Islamic scholar and Dean, School of Foreign Languages, University of Hyderabad**, said different faith communities in India had now no alternative now other than to start dialogue for peace and justice, and in this process, the institutions like IOS could play an important and decisive role.

The third session revolved around "**Information and Communication Technologies as Instruments of Dialogue**". The keynote speaker **Dr Samir Q Fakhro**, known as father of IT in his own country Bahrain, said this was the age of information technology, therefore, the in the process of dialogue the information and communication technologies could play a decisive role. According to him, unlike past in this era it was easy to interact with each other through these instruments. However, he advised to remain connected to the roots and realize ground realities while sticking to values.

Dr Abdul Mateen, Reader, Department of Sociology and Social Work, AMU, Aligarh, dwelt in detail on the topic.

Concluding the session, **Dr Ausaf Ahmad, former Head, Special Assignment, Islamic Development Bank (IDB) and Editor, Urdu quarterly "Mutalleat", New Delhi**, said: "We must not exaggerate the role of the Western technology. We all rely on the West which is the producer of technologies and developing countries are the users or consumers of technologies. Some times economists have advocated for developing countries the use of intermediate technologies or appropriate technologies, but such technologies, even if they existed at the time of industrialization of the West have been discarded. So long, as developing countries acquire necessary technical capability to invent the technologies they require, they have to rely on Western technologies. In this connection the Arabic principle **khud ma safa wa da' ma kadar** (Take what is pure and discard what is impure) can be our guide.

WASTIA SESSION

Meanwhile, a parallel session on "**Wastia---Middle Path of Peace**" was also held. It was presided over by **Prof Saud Alam Qasmi**, Dean, Faculty of Theology, AMU, Aligarh. In his keynote address, **Mohammed Umar Al Qinaie from the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs, Kuwait**, said middle path of peace was the only alternative in the present situation to save the world of conflicts and clashes. Agreeing with him, his colleague **Mohammed Al Umar** said Islam had emphasized upon

it.



L - R :Mr. Mohammed Al Umar from the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs, Kuwait, Prof Saud Alam Qasmi, Dean, Faculty of Theology, AMU, Aligarh, , Mr.Mohammed Umar Al Qinaie from the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs, Kuwait, Dr. Mohd. Manzoor Alam, Chairman, IOS New Delhi

Prof Mohsin Usmani, Dean, School of Foreign Languages, University of Hyderabad, said it was Islam that always asked its followers to adopt **wastia**.

Tauqeer Alam, Reader, Department of Sunni Theology, AMU, Aligarh, opined that the world was in grip of several problems only due to leaving **wastia**.

Agreeing with him, **Prof Ali Mohammed Naqvi**, Department of Shia Theology, AMU, said extremism arrived when **wastia** was said good bye.

Mufti Zahid Ali Khan, Nazim-e-Deeniyat, AMU, said the **wastia** was essential everywhere whether it was the case of individual, group, nation or world.



Book Releasing Ceremony: Dr. Manzoor Alam, Chairman, IOS, New Delhi, Mr. Mohammed Al Umar from the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs, Kuwait, Prof Saud Alam Qasmi, Dean, Faculty of Theology, AMU, Aligarh, Mr. Mohammed Umar Al Qinaie from the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs, Kuwait,

Maulana Sultan Ahmad Islahi, Islamic scholar from Aligarh, discussed the principles of a dialogue and threw light upon its misuse sometimes. Intervening in the discussion, Dr Manzoor Alam said dialogue was not a new phenomenon. Quoting the dialogue between the Creator and Master of the universe, the Almighty Allah and the angels, from the Holy Quran, he said it occurred even at the time of the creation of the human being.



L - R : Prof Z M Khan, former Professor and Head, Department of Political Science, Jamia Millia Islamia, and Secretary General of IOS, Swami Agnivesh, eminent social activist and founder of Arya Sabha, Mr. Sudeep Jain, Reader in Prakrit, Lal Bahadur Shastri Rashtriya Sanskrit Vidyapeeth, Delhi

The fourth business session on “**Dialogue among NGOs**” was presided over by **Swami Agnivesh**,

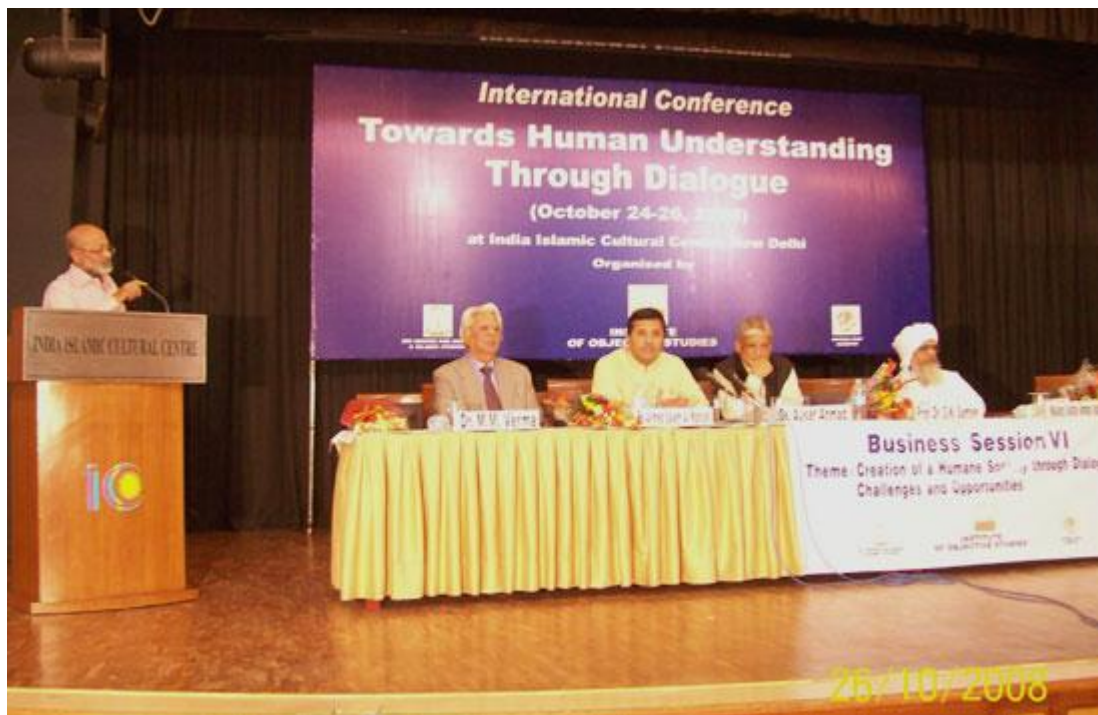
eminent social activist and founder of Arya Sabha.

Prof Z M Khan, former Professor and Head, Department of Political Science, Jamia Millia Islamia, and Secretary General of IOS, in his keynote address, said this was the age of NGOs and their role had become very important in the existing situation everywhere. Sometimes they did what was beyond the reach of the government in many cases of calamities---natural or man-made. Keeping their growing influence, it seemed necessary now to have interaction among themselves. And this was possible only by dialogue, he emphasized.



L - R : Prof Shameem Ansari, Professor of Psychology, AMU, Aligarh, Dr Phool Chand Jain, retired Professor, Benaras Hindu University, Varanasi, Prof Sanghasen Singh, former Professor of Buddhism, University of Delhi, Prof Qamar Ahsan, Vice Chancellor, Maulana Mazharul Haque Arabic and Persian University, Patna, Prof Vinaysheel Gautam, Chairman, D K International Foundation, Gurgaon, Dr. Abdul Majeed Khan, Reader Islamic Studies, AMU Aligarh

Sudeep Jain, Reader in Prakrit, Lal Bahadur Shastri Rashtriya Sanskrit Vidyapeeth, Delhi, too felt it necessary to have a rapport with each other. In his presidential remarks, Swami Agnivesh exhorted the NGOs to come to a platform and have a dialogue. He said in the West the NGOs set the directions of the policy in most of the issues and played a key role in the building of the society.



L - R : Dr. Mohd. Manzoor Alam, Dr M M Verma, senior adviser, India-Russia Chamber of Commerce, New Delhi, HE Dr Ahmed Salem Al Wahishi Ambassador, League of Arab States Mission, Dr. Ausaf Ahmad, IOS, New Delhi, Moulana Sultan Ahmad Islahi, former associate of Idara Tahqeeq-o-Tasneef Islami, Aligarh

On the concluding day, October 26, the fifth business session began with a discussion on “**Inter-Cultural Dialogue in the Indian Context**” under the chairmanship of **Prof Qamar Ahsan, Vice Chancellor, Maulana Mazharul Haque Arabic and Persian University, Patna.**

Prof Sanghasen Singh, former Professor of Buddhism, University of Delhi, in his keynote address, said at a time when the world was talking of inter-faith or inter-civilization dialogue at international level, there was a dire need for an inter-cultural dialogue in the Indian context.

Prof Vinaysheel Gautam, Chairman, D K International Foundation, Gurgaon, India was a country of different cultures, therefore, inter-cultural dialogue here was a must.

Dr Phool Chand Jain, retired Professor, Benaras Hindu University, Varanasi, and Prof Shameem Ansari, Professor of Psychology, AMU, Aligarh, endorsed the views and suggested how to move.

Concluding the session, **Prof Qamar Ahsan** said India was a multi-cultural country. So, a dialogue was imminent to remove misunderstandings about each other and help create a congenial atmosphere.

In the sixth session, the participants pondered over “**Creation of a Humane Society through Dialogue: Challenges and Opportunities**”. **Dr Ausaf Ahmad** presented his keynote paper and pointed out a number of challenges and opportunities.

HE Dr Ahmed Salem Al Wahishi Ambassador, League of Arab States Mission said there were, no doubt, challenges but opportunities are also a lot. While dealing with the practical difficulties, “we would have to march towards creating a humane society through dialogue,” he asserted.

Dr M M Verma, senior adviser, India-Russia Chamber of Commerce, New Delhi, said a

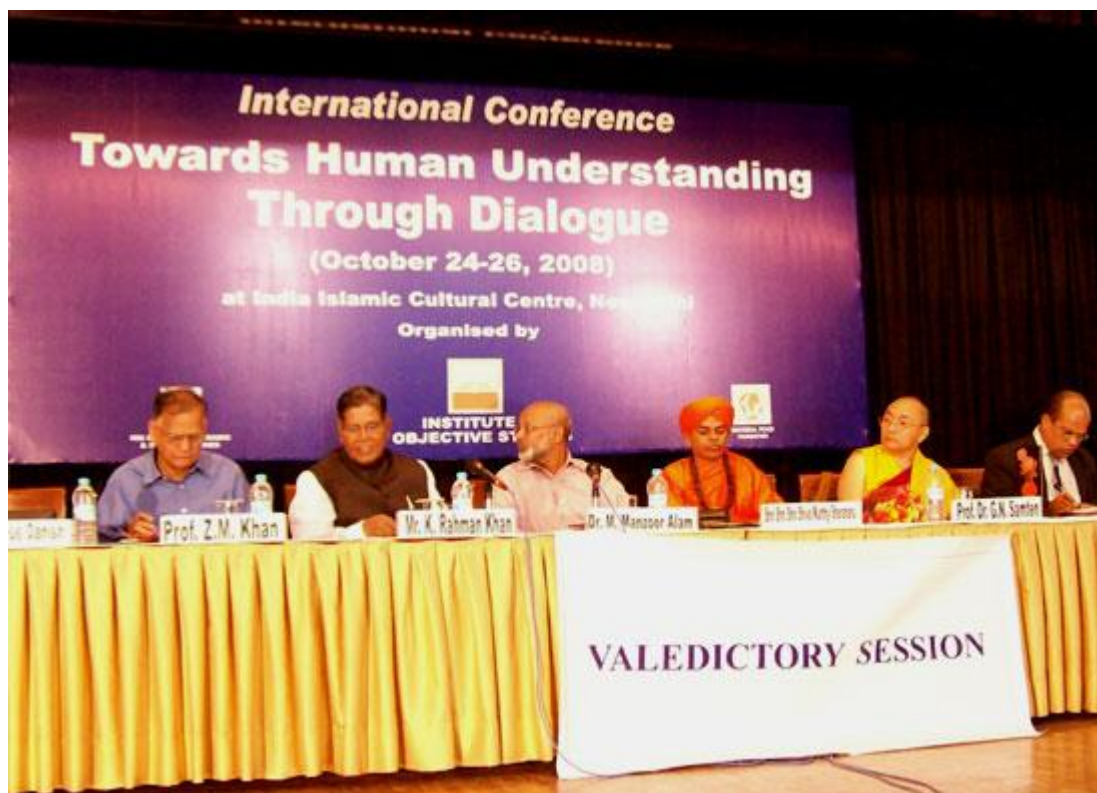
realistic approach to the creation of a humane society could overcome the challenges.

Maulana Sultan Ahmad Islahi, also a former associate of Idara Tahqeeq-o-Tasneef Islami, Aligarh, was of the view that there were many challenges in the creation of a humane society through dialogue.

An interactive session was addressed by Prof Z M Khan, Dr Ishteyaque Danish, and Dr Ausaf Ahmad, Secretary General, Assistant Secretary General and Finance Secretary of IOS, respectively.

VALEDICTORY SESSION

The three-day international conference came to an end with the valedictory session under the chairmanship of **Dr Manzoor Alam.**



Prof.Z.M.Khan, Secretary General, IOS, New Delhi, Mr. K.Rahman Khan, Deputy Speaker, Rajya Sabha(Parliament), Dr. Mohd. Manzoor Alam, Chairman, IOS, New Delhi, Shri Shri Shri Shiva Murthy Sharanaru, Pontiff of Sri Murugha Muth Chitra Durga, Karnataka, Prof G N Samten, Director, Central Institute of Higher Tibetan Studies, Varanasi, Mr. Mushtaque Ahmad

Rajya Sabha Deputy Chairperson K Rahman Khan, in his valedictory address hoped there would be harnessed creative potentials and energies of various religions to foster culture of peace, co-existence and justice among different sections at all levels.

Prof G N Samten, Director, Central Institute of Higher Tibetan Studies, Varanasi, said dialogue was necessary for a peaceful co-existence.

Shri Shri Shri Shiva Murthy Sharanaru, Pontiff of Sri Murugha Muth Chitra Durga, Karnataka, averred that a humane society was needed and it was only possible when the leaders of all religions would gather at a common platform and decide a common strategy through dialogue.

Dr Manzoor Alam, in the concluding address, emotionally urged the participants in general and youth in particular to come ahead and march towards a human understanding through dialogue.

Mushtaque Ahmad, advocate and convener, IOS Committee on Law, proposed a vote of thanks. Earlier, IOS Secretary General **Prof Z M Khan** presented an eight-point resolution that was passed unanimously.

This occasion also saw the release of four books and IOS Calendar 2009, based on facts and data, being brought out for the last over 20 years. The books included "**Profile Jews in the Light of Glorious Quran**" by Dr Zakir Azmi, "**Harmony of Faith and Civilization**" edited by Dr M M Verma, "**Aapattiyan Ewam Wastawiktaen**" by Abdur Rab Karimi, and "**Nabi-e-Rahmat Ka Payam-e-Rahmat**" by Maulana Abdullah Tariq.

**National Seminar
on
'Fostering Inter-Community Linkages in India'**

28-30 March, 2003

Organized by

INSTITUTE OF OBJECTIVE STUDIES

This Seminar was a 3-day National Seminar and it was held from 28th to 30th March, 2003 at Hamdard Convention Centre, Hamdard Nagar, New Delhi. The seminar was organized by the Institute of Objective Studies in collaboration with Hamdard University, New Delhi.

The 3-day seminar discussed at length 'India's Composite Heritage, Composite Culture, National Integration in the Constitutional Framework, National Identity, and Restoring Inter-Community Linkages: Role of the State, Civil Society, and Media' in different sessions.

The delegates/contributors and the participants of this seminar were from a wide ranging persons of repute including former Prime Minister of India, former Chief Justice of India, former Union Minister, Educationists, Intellectuals, Journalists, Judges, Advocates, Social activists, Bureaucrats and other Luminaries from different parts of the country. The dignitaries include Prof. Lord Bhiku Parekh from U.K.; Shri I. K. Gujral, former Prime Minister of India; Hon'ble Justice Mr. A. M. Ahmadi, former Chief Justice of India; Shri Chaturanan Mishra, former Union Minister and Senior CPI Leader, and Saiyid Hamid, Chancellor of Jamia Hamdard.

Before the start of the Inaugural Session of the National Seminar all the delegates and participants maintained a two-minute silence to mourn the massacre of 24 innocent Kashmiri Pandits at Nandi Marg in the state of J&K.

During the Inaugural Session on March 28, 2003 Dr. M. Manzoor Alam, Chairman, Institute of Objective Studies, New Delhi, in his Welcome Address said "Our Constitution stresses the need for a pluralistic society while providing equal freedom and opportunities to each community—religious, linguistic and regional. But it is painful that the notion of a pluralistic, federal, accommodative and composite National Identity is under assault. As is obvious, in a pluralistic and multi-cultural society like India, national identity can't be based on a homogeneous national character simply because a homogeneous national character does not exist in India.

He also said, as the Member of British Parliament, Lord Bhiku Parikh once perceptively observed, political or national unity did not require cultural homogeneity and was preserved in climate of flourishing and self-confident cultural diversity. According to him, sadly over the last 54 years, there were too many infractions. Trauma of partition inflicted a blow. Thereafter, the country saw a chain of riots. The latest was the pogrom in Gujarat. According to the data presented in the country's Parliament, the report of the Home Ministry and Newspaper reports, about 14000 communal incidents/riots have occurred during the period: 1953—2003.

Shri Chaturanan Mishra, former Union Agriculture Minister, in his Inaugural Address, agreed to the opinion expressed by Dr. M. Manzoor Alam in his Welcome Address and said that

India is a country of 28 states and 7 Union Territories, 6 major religions, 18 major languages, 1600 minor languages and dialects, 6 main ethnic groups, 52 major tribes, 6400 castes and sub-castes, besides 29 major festivals. Besides, there exist the climatic diversity of a continent and the flora and fauna of two continents, he said. Therefore, there was always a lead to pay a special attention to keep the social fabric united. And in this great task only the symposia and seminars would not be enough. "We will have to come out openly against those forces who are spreading communal venom and counter them effectively and have to go to the masses to awaken them", he added.

Shri Mishra, who is a prominent leader of Communist Party of India, also said that what rights have been enshrined in the Constitution of India with regard to minorities were comparable to such rights in any country of the world. They were in accord with the UN Charter. He also said that the tragic happenings in Gujarat last year were a blot on the face of our country. He opined that they could not just be termed as "communal riots". According to him, this incidence was a pogrom.

Mr. Siraj Hussain, Vice-Chancellor, Jamia Hamdard, said that a crucial discussion on such topic was the need of the hour. And this could only be done through social and political mobilization.

Maulana Abdullah Mughaisi, Secretary General of All India Milli Council, averred that the entire humanity was in peril due to various internal and external factors. "Therefore, we the different communities of India should develop such a mechanism by which the gap between different communities is not enhanced and a bond of confidence, trust and mutual cooperation should continue".

"Every community in India has the right to survive with its separate and independent identity. The principle of pluralism calls for identification and preservation of the values, traditions, and culture of different communities. There should not be dominance of one community over another. At the same time minorities' rights should also not be suppressed".

Expressing the above views in his Presidential Address at the Inaugural Session of the National Seminar (28th March, 2003), the former Chief Justice of India, Hon'ble Justice Mr. A. M. Ahmadi said that this could be possible only by social and political mobilization and for this we will have to go to the masses and get them awakened.

The eminent jurist said it was ironic that unfortunately some people or groups were of the view that they could achieve their ambitions by the use of might. According to him, this trend was being seen since early 90s. He also said that for a cultural development, the economic & educational development is an essential pre-requisite.

On day second (March 29, 2003) in the first Business Session: India's Composite Heritage, the former Member of British House of Lords (UK) and presently the Centennial Professor at the London School of Economics, Prof. Lord Bhikhu Parekh, delivering his Key-note Address said "if we are really serious, we should try to make the composite heritage and culture a living reality. For this religious leaders of all the communities would have to come closer and try to raise common platforms and devise common strategies." Lord Parekh averred that the above steps would help fostering the inter-community linkages in India.

The noted historian, Prof. Bipan Chandra (Chairperson of the 1st Business Session), agreeing with Lord Parekh said that there had been a change with regard to the inter-community linkages in the country after different religious reform movements started in the 19th century. According to him, prior to this period, there was an appreciable communal

harmony among different communities. He recalled that no marriage in a state like Punjab could be solemnised without the presence of other religious leaders before the 19th century. "There have been both positive and negative impacts upon this society following the religious reform movements of the 19th century. The positive impact was that there started a discussion on the evils of traditions like *sati* and caste system. Its negative impact was that some groups began to give a call to go back to the extreme past for the revival of ancient religious traditions, which resulted in the revivalist and extremist movements of the modern time. He further opined that what is lacking now in the sphere of inter-community relations, could be traced back to the 19th century religious reforms and extremist movements.

Further, both Lord Bhikhu Parekh and Prof. Bipan Chandra termed the last year's Gujarat pogrom as the most unfortunate incident. They were of the view that it did occur due to the indifferent attitude of the state government and administrative bureaucracy. According to them, if the inter-community linkages had been strong, the situation there would not have deteriorated to such an extent.

In the 2nd and 3rd Business Sessions (of 29th March, 2003): India's Composite Culture, and National Integration in the Constitutional Framework renowned persons participated, while in the 4th and 5th Business Sessions (of 30th March, 2003): India's National Identity, and Restoring Inter-Community Linkages-- Role of the State, Civil Society, and the Media, noted journalists, bureaucrats and distinguished educationists participated in panel discussion and discussed the subjects at length.

At the conclusion of the 3-day National Seminar on "Fostering Inter-Community Linkages in India" at Hamdard Convention Centre on Sunday (30th March, 2003), Shri I. K. Gujral, former Prime Minister, in his Valedictory Address, called for a war between obscurantism and modernism. Without naming any group or referring to any incident, he said that opposing obscurantism did not mean support to the West. However, his assertion led to a lively debate when IOS Chairman, Dr. M. Manzoor Alam said that there should be balance while linking and delinking the present and the past, otherwise, it might create a lot of problem, particularly in the present context. Then Shri Gujral replied that he had become a perfectionists while expressing his views in the valedictory session and he had nothing in mind with regard to present situation.

Resolutions

The think tank, Institute of Objective Studies and Jamia Hamdard, adopted a 7-point resolution in the presence of Mr. I. K. Gujral and about 300 other participants from the different parts of the country. The resolutions are as under:

1. The US-led invasion of Iraq, which blatantly disregards the UN sanction and violates all canons of international law, deserves to be condemned in the strongest of terms. The invasion must immediately stop and the UN must be allowed to play its legitimate role in the resolution of the crisis.
2. The recurrent spate of violence and terrorism in the state of J&K needs to be strongly condemned. This seminar strongly and unequivocally condemns the brutal killing of 24 Kashmiri Pandits at Nandimarg in Kashmir on March 24.
3. There is an urgent need to have a statutory anti-discrimination commission, with special provisions and powers for the redressal of the grievances felt and experienced by the minorities.

4. The seminar places on record the laudable services rendered by the judiciary, especially in the context of judicial activism. The participants at the seminar strongly feel that judicial activism should be broadened to encompass the protection of minority rights.
5. It should be made mandatory on state governments to take appropriate action on the findings and recommendations of judicial commissions and commissions of inquiry, particularly in respect of the violation of the rights of minorities, tribal communities and Dalits.
6. The institutions of civil society must be strengthened. The non-governmental organisations which are working to foster communal harmony and inter-community linkages must coordinate their activities and efforts so as to make this role and functioning more effective.
7. The national media has played a positive and constructive role, specially in recent years. The participants in the seminar feel that the national media should make efforts to project and highlight the contributions made by the Muslim community as well as the positive and healthy developments in the community in respect of education and development.

Welcome Address

by

Dr. Mohd. Manzoor Alam

Chairman, Institute of Objective Studies, New Delhi

Ladies and gentlemen,

I have the pleasure to welcome you here to this three-day seminar on 'Fostering Inter-Community Linkages in India'.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I come here with a heavy heart. The endless spectacle of columns of smoke and fire rising from bombed Iraqi cities and the formidable scale of death and destruction visiting upon a country already half dead from stringent US-led UN sanctions leaves us with a gnawing sense of hurt and injustice. We are here to talk about fostering inter-community linkages, and we are aware that the world itself is a macro-community.

This macro-community had certain rules, traditions and the authority of international law to govern relations between its constituents. There was the UN Charter, the General Assembly, the Security Council. Everything has gone up in smoke; the international conventions and covenants have been turned into rubble like the rubble of the bombed Iraqi cities. Brute force has elbowed out considerations of legitimacy. Shorn of legitimacy, the macro-community itself has become suspect. UN estimates say this inferno will consume half a million Iraqi lives.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We are meeting in difficult times. When we narrow our focus down to concentrate our sight on our own country, we see a corresponding reality obtaining here. Here too all

considerations of legitimacy and rule-of-law have been jettisoned with contempt. The state seems to have unilaterally abdicated in favour of the mob. That, I must admit, is a disconcerting scenario. The mob has rejected the Constitution, and the state has meekly acquiesced. It is a dangerous drift.

The civilisational warp and woof of this great country was painstakingly constructed over centuries of shared lives of diverse communities, each with its own religious, cultural, linguistic and ethnic distinction – a multi-hued salad bowl, in contemporary political scientists' language.

The Constitution stressed the need for a pluralistic society while providing equal freedom and opportunities to each community – religious, linguistic and regional.

This was as it should have been in a country of 28 states and 7 Union Territories, 6 major religions, 18 major languages, 1,600 minor languages and dialects, 6 main ethnic groups, 52 major tribes, 6,400 castes and sub-castes, besides 29 major festivals. Add to that the climatic diversity of a continent and the flora and fauna of two continents.

Sadly, over that last 54 years or so, there have been too many infarctions. The trauma of Partition inflicted a blow. Thereafter the country saw a chain of communal riots. The latest was the pogrom in Gujarat. According to data presented in Parliament, the report of the Home Ministry and newspaper reports, about 14,000 communal incidents/riots have occurred during 1950-2003.

The process of identity formation in South Asia and the emergence of communal identities, carefully midwived by the British Raj, is a familiar subject in the international academia. The strident posture of *Hindutva* that we witness today had its seeds in the developments in the second half of the nineteenth century as clearly outlined by some of the finest scholars on the subject like Christoph Jafferlot, John Zavos and Vasudha Dalmia. We have nearly a dozen scholars in India also whose work is as good as of these people teaching in Western universities.

From the 19th century British project rose the *Hindutva* of V.D. Savarkar in the first half of the 20th century to fuel all the divisive, illiberal movements and manifestoes menacing India today. This is the binary opposite of what India's composite nationalism has stood for all these ages. This is just the reverse side of everything the Constitution stands for, everything that the social ethos of the country entails.

Ladies and gentlemen, as I said we are living in difficult times. Under assault is the notion of a pluralistic, federal, accommodative and composite national identity. Though unarticulated, it enjoys the tacit approval of an overwhelming majority of the Indian population. It is based on our centuries-old composite traditions and is enshrined in the country's Constitution. It has been endorsed by the stalwarts of the Independence movement from 1857 to 1947. It is also in accordance with humanistic ethos and the prevailing intellectual climate.

In a pluralistic and multi-cultural society like India, national identity can't be based on a homogenous national character simply because a homogenous national character does not exist in India. As Lord Bhikhu Parekh, who is amongst us here, once perceptively observed, political or national unity does not require cultural homogeneity and is preserved in a climate of flourishing and self-confident cultural diversity.

A plural and multi-cultural society needs to strike a balance within a democratic framework, between the conflicting demands of national unity and cultural diversity. This mission, entails three pre-requisites:

1. The state must provide autonomous space in which the various segments of the society can feel secure.

2. The Indian Constitution confers citizenship on all sections and segments of the population. As is obvious, citizenship necessarily entails equal civil and political rights. The state is obliged to ensure that these rights are enjoyed by all sections of the society in equal measure and that they are not denied in any way.
3. The institutions of the state – Parliament, government, bureaucracy and police – should be widely perceived by all sections of the society as legitimate, fair and just. If any segment of the society loses faith in the legitimacy of any of these institutions, it reflects adversely on the state.

The situation obtaining at national and international levels involves genuine misperceptions about Islam and Muslims as well as sustained creation and reinforcement of unflattering Muslim stereotypes by anti-Muslim groups over a long period of time. As human behaviour is imitative and reciprocal, it has also generated among a section of Muslims an unreasonable stance, and a keen desire to undo this oppressive, unjust, anti-Muslim dispensation in whatever legal or extralegal way possible. Let us be clear that no unreasonable, extralegal Muslim response can be endorsed.

But going beyond that, we do realise that Islam does have a tradition of fair play and is ideologically opposed to ideas of racial superiority, superiority on the basis of the accident of birth, and everything else that promotes inequity. That inclusive, pluralistic framework is still relevant.

Islam's insistence on all Creation being the family of God is a central idea that has to be taken note of. These lines from Altaf Husain Hali's *Musaddas* beautifully portray the Islamic world view:

This was the first teaching of the Book of Guidance {The Qur'an}.

That all humanity is the family of God;

He alone is the friend of the Lord

Who is friendly to the Lord's creations.

What is devotion, religion, faith?

That man should help his brother man.

We would be discussing in different sessions during next two days India's composite heritage; its composite culture; national integration in the Constitutional framework; India's identity; restoring inter-community linkages: role of the state, civil society and media, separately. We hope this seminar would help in fostering inter-community linkages in the country.

Key-note Address

"FOSTERING INTER-COMMUNITY LINKAGES IN INDIA"

Professor A. R. Momin
University of Mumbai

We are passing through distressing times, both at home and globally. The tidal waves of hatred, disharmony and aggressiveness are threatening to drown our little islands of sanity, harmony and peaceful coexistence. The US-led invasion of Iraq has not only betrayed the hegemonic and imperialist designs of the United States but has also exposed the fragility of the United Nations and the utter helplessness of the international community. Nearer home, the forces of divisiveness and totalitarianism seem to be surging forward, casting an

ominous shadow over the fabric of our civilization, over our centuries-old legacy of peaceful coexistence and communal harmony.

In this unenviable situation, many of us feel disillusioned and frustrated. Many of us have been overtaken by despair and cynicism. But, for heaven's sake, let's pause for a moment and ask ourselves: Is it prudent to throw up our hands in despair and allow the forces of evil to wreck our society and our civilization? Will our passivity and silence not embolden those who are busy spreading the message of hatred and ill-will? Will it be wise to forget our cherished ideals, the sacrifices of our forebears, simply because we feel powerless? Let us not lose heart. Crises and challenges are a part and parcel of human existence, of society and history. The history of civilization bears testimony to this fact.

I would like to congratulate the Institute of Objective Studies for taking the initiative in this direction, for reminding us that all is not lost, that there is still room for hope and optimism, for urging us to join hands in order to save our country from fragmentation and anarchy.

The comparative study of civilization provides two significant and inter-related insights. On the one hand, one can scarcely fail to notice a wide range of diversities across, as well as within, cultures and civilizations. On the other hand, there seems to be a universal process of cultural exchange and cross-fertilization. Civilizations, in other words, evolve through a dynamic process of adaptation and accommodation, of intermingling of ideas, institutions and cultural patterns.

Since the middle of the second millennium BC, Indian civilization has drawn several streams of migrant groups and communities to its fold. In the course of time, these groups and communities underwent an extensive process of indigenization. They adapted themselves to local conditions and were influenced by the languages, beliefs and customs of the indigenous people. The Indian subcontinent has witnessed one of the most creative and fascinating experiments in cultural cross-fertilization. The fabric of Indian civilization has been woven from textures and hues drawn from a variety of sources.

There are frequent references in Vedic and post-Vedic literature to the migration of foreign people, such as the Yavana, Abhira and Kushana. Manu mentions that several foreign tribes who came in contact with the Aryan people were drawn into the orbit of Hindu society.

The fact that India is a multi-racial, multi-religious, multi-lingual and multicultural society is too well known to be repeated or elaborated. What is less known and acknowledged and what needs to be emphasized in the context of present times is the existence of wide-ranging diversities in the fold of Hinduism. According to Hindu belief, the ultimate reality is infinite and hence cannot be apprehended in its totality by the human mind which is finite. Different religious traditions symbolize different ways of understanding and approaching the ultimate reality. The Rg Veda says that Truth or Reality is one, though sages call it by different names. In the Bhagwatgita Lord Krishna says that whoever comes to me through whatever route, I reach out to him; all paths ultimately lead to me.

Since ages, the Hindu tradition and Hindu society have been pluralistic and differentiated, rather than monolithic and homogeneous. The Ramayana, for example, has several versions or variants. There is a rich tradition of agnosticism and atheism in Hindu philosophy. Eminent historians, such as R. S. Sharma and Romila Thapar, have observed that Hinduism represents a pluralistic cultural universe, that it is a mosaic of distinct ideas, cults, deities and sects. Therefore, those who speak of one country, one culture and one language are either ignorant of the history and dynamics of Indian civilization or they are deliberately distorting it for some ulterior motive.

A while ago, I spoke about the interface between diversity and unity, between pluralism and syncretism. Indian civilization represents a mosaic of beliefs, ideas and cultural patterns, a mosaic in which every design, every motif has a distinct place and yet it forms an inseparable part of the larger design. Our composite civilizational heritage is reflected in every facet of our society: in our languages and literary traditions, in our folklore, in art and architecture, in music, in the struggle for independence. Our composite legacy pervades the whole fabric of Indian civilization.

Tulsidas' Ramcharit Manas contains scores of Arabic and Persian words. One of my late friends, Ramlal Nabhavi, who was a great scholar of Hindi, Sanskrit, Persian and Urdu, has identified more than 90 Persian translations of the Ramayana. Some of them have been printed, others are in the form of manuscripts. Similarly, there are more than 30 translations of the Ramayana in Urdu.

Indian Muslims have made highly important and wide-ranging contributions to the evolution and development of India's composite heritage. They introduced a number of technological innovations and crafts in India, including the windmill, carpet weaving, sericulture, pedals in looms, paper making, the technique of enameling glass, the use of artillery and canon. The famed pottery of Jaipur and Khurja bears the unmistakable influence of Persian and Central Asian techniques and motifs.

Monuments of Indo-Islamic architecture exhibit an exquisite blend of Saracenic, Persian and Central Asian styles and designs, on the one hand, and Rajput and Jain architectural styles, on the other.

A highly significant contribution to India's composite civilizational heritage was made by the Sufis. They set up their khanqahs or hospices in the midst of the deprived and marginalized sections of society. They communicated in the language and dialect of the common people, shared their joys and sorrows and won their hearts with their simplicity, kindness and compassion. They sought to build bridges across people of different religious persuasions and ethnic backgrounds. Someone presented scissors to the celebrated 13th century Sufi Baba Farid. He refused to take it and said: Don't give me scissors; give me a needle, for I don't cut, I stitch. This anecdote symbolizes the emphasis placed by the Sufis on building bridges and fostering linkages among people. The famous Sufi saint Ajmer Khwaja Muinuddin Chishti of Ajmer is reported to have said: A man of God possesses compassion and kindness like that of the sun, generosity like that of the river, and humility like that of the earth. Khwaja Nizamuddin Awliya was very fond of reciting these verses of Shaykh Abu Said Abul Khayr:

*He who is not my friend—
May God be his friend.
And he who causes me distress--
May his joy increase.
He who places thorns in my path-
With malice in his heart,
May every flower that blooms
In the garden of his life
Be without a single thorn.*

Tolerance, peaceful coexistence and sharing of cultural and emotional spaces are not things of the past; they are still an important part of our collective life, particularly in the rural areas. My friend Dr. K. S. Singh, former Director-General, Anthropological Survey of India,

who will be here tomorrow, has documented this fact in the celebrated People of India project. This project shows that most communities and social groups are located within the cultural-linguistic region, where they share material traits, social and cultural spaces, languages and dialects, local customs and festivals, kinship organization, regional ethos and identity.

It is important to emphasize that the evolution of India's composite heritage did not lead to a collapse or dilution of ethnic boundaries and religious identities. Hindus, Muslims and other communities maintained their respective religious and ethnic identities and traditions and respected the boundaries in which these identities and traditions were embedded. At the same time, they shared substantial cultural spaces, in language and literature, cuisine, music, architecture, arts and crafts, regional ethos.

Before I conclude, I would like to make a few observations about India's national identity, which is now surrounded by a good deal of confusion and controversy. First, the assumption that a country or nation-state must have a homogeneous national culture is no longer valid, it is passé. Most countries in Europe, North America, Asia and Africa have accepted this reality. Secondly, there is no necessary correlation between political unity and cultural homogeneity. In other words, the rhetoric of cultural nationalism is an eyewash. Lurking behind the rhetoric is majoritarian hegemony and tyranny.

Thirdly, like individuals, ethnic groups and cultural communities have multiple, overlapping identities. A modern nation should allow sufficient autonomous spaces for the protection and development of these identities. Fortunately, the Constitution of India takes due cognizance of the country's pluralistic ethos and guarantees the protection of the cultural rights and aspirations of its various communities.

Finally, India's national identity needs to be defined in terms of democratic pluralism rather than majoritarian democracy. It needs to be defined in the light of our composite civilizational ethos rather than on the basis of the culture of the dominant population. In other words, India's national identity should be inclusive rather than exclusive, tolerant and accommodative rather than totalitarian and tyrannical, open-ended and fluid rather than closed and rigid. These are conceptual, rather than verbal, differences.

I am sure the deliberations in this seminar in the next two days will show us the ways in which our centuries-old bonds and linkages can be restored and strengthened.

Three-day International Conference
on
Inter-Civilisational Dialogue in a Globalising World
by
Institute of Objective Studies

April 8-9, 2005 at FICCI Auditorium, New Delhi



L-R: Prof. Z.M. Khan (Secretary General, IOS), Archbishop Dr Vincent Concessao (Archbishop of Delhi), Dr Adel A. Al-Falah (Undersecretary, Ministry of Awqaf & Islamic Affairs, Kuwait), Dr Abdullah Omar Nasseef (Former Deputy Speaker, Majlis-e-Shura, KSA), Mr Shivraj Patil (Hon'ble Minister for Home Affairs, Govt. of India), Hon'ble Justice A.M. Ahmadi (Former Chief Justice of India & Chancellor AMU), Dr Anwar Ibrahim (Former Deputy Prime Minister of Malaysia), Dr Mohammed Manzoor Alam (Chairman, IOS), Mrs Sheila Dikshit (Hon'ble Chief Minister, NCT of Delhi), Prof. Manzoor Ahmad (Vice Chairman, IOS)

**Welcome Address by Dr. M. Manzoor Alam, Chairman, IOS**

Mr. Chairman, honourable Justice A. M. Ahmadi, Mr. Shivraj Patil, Minister for Home Affairs, Govt. of India, Dr. Anwar Ibrahim, Mrs. Sheila Dikshit, Dr. Abdullah Omer Nasseef, Dr. Karan Singh, Dr. Adel A. Al-Falah, Archbishop Dr. Vincent Concessao, Your Excellencies, delegates from various parts of the country and abroad, representatives of the media, ladies and gentleman, I feel honoured, privileged and humbled to welcome you to this august gathering in the capital of India, which is one of the world's most ancient and dynamic civilisations and a perfect example of multi-culturalism.

Heir to a brilliant, composite cultural legacy, this county is poised for a giant leap into a future of technological leadership, economic prosperity and cultural flowering. It is in the fitness of things that the momentous three-day event that begins now should take place in New Delhi.

My great friend Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, a votary of "Asian values" comes from Malaysia, a country that calls itself "Truly Asia". We have amidst us the one and the only Dr. Abdullah Omar Naseef, a man of extraordinary learning and erudition, Dy Speaker of Saudi Arabia's Majlise-Shura, which is their National Assembly. A man of great vision and compassion, Dr. Naseef will tell us how to go about having a more peaceful and humane world. We are also fortunate to have among us the dynamic Dr. Adel al-Falah, a senior government official from Kuwait who has dedicated himself to social causes.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

India holds a mirror to the world, in which virtually all civilisations and racial groups can see themselves. With its amazing diversity of flora and fauna, climates, beliefs and ways of worship, racial types and cultural patterns, India is the right setting in which deliberations of such far-reaching consequences as scheduled for the next three days should be taking place.

With a cutting edge technological infrastructure and world class human resource base, a buoyant economy that moves ahead at a fast clip of around 7 percent yearly growth, India is emerging as a major international presence. The deep anchor of civilisational values, a remarkable Constitution and thriving democracy ensure that the march into a prosperous future is not derailed.

We are to examine the ways and means of fostering inter-civilisational dialogue in a globalising world. Let us begin by trying to see whether we can come to some commonly agreed upon idea of what globalisation itself means and what are its promises and perils. Like most people in the developing world, I have mixed feelings about the relentless onrush of globalisation, which threatens to inundate us with entirely unfamiliar cultural patterns, modes of production and consumption, and new social and moral orientations.

As globalisation raises expectations of a better quality of life for the middle and upper middle classes in the years ahead it also threatens to disrupt older life patterns, impoverish local communities and destroy livelihoods at less economically developed levels.



L-R: Dr Abdullah Omar Nasseef (Former Deputy Speaker, Majlis-e-Shura,KSA) and Dr Adel A. Al-Falah (Undersecretary, Ministry of Awqaf &Islamic Affairs, Kuwait)

Globalisation is a double-edged sword that cuts both ways: it can accelerate economic development and prosperity of ever larger number of people worldwide, but it can also destabilise less developed societies and deepen inequities. The developing world had been assured that globalisation would have a humane face, but the promise is yet to be fulfilled in any meaningful measure. A humane face would ultimately help the markets, globalisation's reigning deity, as much as it would helped the common people. A humane face is ultimately in the interest of us all.

Globalisation also tends to create and aggravate inequity among countries; however, it entails a contraction of the world and collapsing of distances because of growing air travel, internet and e-

mail. New military technologies, that enable powerful countries to strike with extraordinary swiftness and devastating fire power, have made the weaker countries more vulnerable to diplomatic pressure. New doctrines like Total Spectrum Dominance and Pre-emptive Strike make things more uncertain in a world where old doctrines of international legitimacy are giving way to more innovative ideas. The world has become more dangerous after the Cold War.

In this backdrop of an entirely changed geo-political climate we are meeting here. It is clear why an inter-civilisational dialogue is needed today more than at any other time in the past. The question of inter-civilisational dialogue has at its centre the issues of “identity”, “otherness” and “hybridity”, to use familiar terms from related academic discourse. In short, it is about who we are, and who are the others who are not “we”. It is also about “in-betweenness”, that is, hybrid identities that combine elements of different, often contesting, identities like the Jewish citizen of Nazi Germany, in the extreme instance. However, on a closer analysis most identities are composed of different elements without any conflict among those elements.

Coming from an Indo-Islamic background I knew early on from personal experience that God had intended the world to have a plural character, a home to all colours, creeds and castes. The Quran clearly lays out that if God had so wanted He would have made everyone a Muslim. From this and from my social milieu I learnt that difference had not only to be tolerated, but accepted, even celebrated. This is how in the great cauldron of time all manner of civilisations have come together to form a larger human civilisation with almost standardised norms of civility, compassion and truthfulness.

The world in which we live is not perfect. But somehow it got more imperfect with the publication in the 90s of Prof. Samuel P. Huntington’s famous article “Clash of Civilisations and the Making of a New World Order” in the American journal *Foreign Affairs*. The article was such a sensation that Prof. Huntington came up with a book with the same title, expanding on the theme. It presented a frightening picture of conflict between civilisations in the years ahead. Western Christianity (as opposed to the Orthodox Church) was alleged to be on a headlong collision course with the world of Islam, which would possibly be supported by the Chinese civilisation. This idea was publicly rejected by some of the top Western political leaders and academics. However, following the 9/11 attacks the war in Afghanistan and Iraq came to confirm some of our worst fears about Prof. Huntington’s theory.

That the conflict could escalate to assume the proportions of a truly inter-civilisational scale was evident from Paul Wolfowitz’s claim that nearly 60 countries could be on target in a “rolling war” that could last more than a decade. True to his claims the war rolled on to Iraq after making mincemeat of the Taliban. It is no coincidence that if we exclude North Korea the number of targeted countries is almost identical to the membership of Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC). That we had been moving dangerously towards a future which nobody really wanted was quite obvious.

By the time of the Millennium Summit at the UN, a counter movement was well on its way. It was called Dialogue Between Civilisations and had the full backing of the UN and the world community, which was determined to pull back from the precipice and start a positive trend. Although men like Nehru, Gandhi – and in our own time Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim – had been working on the idea since much earlier, many clear voices were heard in its favour, including

those of UN Secretary General Kofi Annan and Iranian President Syed Mohammad Khatami. Since then the support for it has grown exponentially.

Welcoming you here I have the extraordinary role played by New Delhi in mind in the formation and leadership of the Non-Aligned Movement, the movement for the liberation of Afro-Asian people, and now the movement for a just world order and dialogue between civilisations. Two years ago, the Government of India had hosted a similar meet here, which was inaugurated by the Prime Minister and attended by delegates from 80 countries.

This time round the initiative has been taken by an NGO, the Institute of Objective Studies (IOS) which shows that in India, like other democracies, non-state actors play a significant role in public life. In fact, IOS has been at the forefront of the dialogue between communities, faiths and civilisations since its inception in 1986. The IOS has been contributing significant research in social sciences and articulating issues of concern to national and international life. We have an exhibition outside this auditorium on IOS which says it all in pictures.

With this I welcome you all again and invite you to don your thinking caps.



A view of audience

**Keynote Address by Dr. Anwar Ibrahim, Former Deputy Prime Minister of Malaysia**

It is an immense pleasure for me to speak at this conference. “Inter-Civilisational Dialogue”, especially after September 11, is a mighty discourse. But it is also a subject very close to my heart, even long before the tragic event. Dialogue among civilizations, for our world today, is a global imperative. We live in one global village and interconnected village. All living civilizations are crammed into this village. So, we cannot talk to one another. Nor can we talk down to one another. We must talk to one another and we must talk as equal.

My interest in it is both intellectual, as well as practical. The country I come from, Malaysia, is made up of three major ethnic groups – Malays, Chinese and Indians. And each ethnic group, in its own way, represents at least one great Asian civilization – the Islamic civilization, the Chinese civilization and the Indian civilization. My country is like a great cauldron, or perhaps a great ocean, fed by three rivers of great civilizations. So one has to know one another, and must talk to one another. For this reason, when I was deputy prime minister I persuaded the University of Malaya to organize a conference on civilization dialogue between Islam and Confucianism. I would have organized one conference on dialogue of civilization between Islam and Hinduism if I was not sent to an extended vacation. Nonetheless the conference led to the establishment of the Centre for Civilizational Dialogue at the university.

The influence of Indian civilization to my region – Southeast Asia – is profound as it was enriching. The two greatest monuments in my region, the Borabodur in Java and the Angkor Watt in Cambodia, are creative and aesthetic response of Southeast Asia to the impulse of Indian

civilization. In its formative stage my region is often described by historians as part of the “Greater India” and its polity as “Indianised states of Southeast Asia”. Stories from the Ramayana and Mahabharata are part of our folklore. In Kelantan (Malaysia), often described as a most puritanical Muslim state, traditional performing arts are all creative improvisation of themes from these great epics.

However, the impact of the Indian cultural energy is not only something of a distant past. It is a living force. One of my greatest regret in the last months of my tenure in the government is not being able to organize an international conference on the universal significance of Rabindranath Tagore, as a continuation of a series of international conferences on the Asian renaissance. The underlying motivation of this series of conferences was to honour the precursors of the Asian renaissance such as Toghre, Muhammad Iqbal, Jose Rizal, Lu Xun and several others. Not merely to honour them sentimentally, but to learn from their intellectual and cultural adventure, and to carry on from where they left.

I believed during that time, I still do, that Asia will have a great future. It has a great past. And I thought if it could renew itself Asia will again contribute towards the enrichment of global culture. It was also a time of Asian jingoism, especially among the so-called economic tigers and economic dragons, a few years before the Asian financial crisis. In their obsession with economic pursuit these jingoists were presenting a truncated vision of Asia. No matter how successful, Asia cannot be defined in economic terms alone. In fact no civilization can be defined or reduced to its performance in providing economic wellbeing. It is important to be economically successful so that people will not suffer the pain of poverty and destitution. But it cannot be the all and one all. So the Asian renaissance conferences sought to remind the world and Asian themselves that Asia is a civilization, or Asia contains several civilizations. Not only Asia has to talk to the West, Asia also must talk among themselves. The Muslim must not only talk to the West, Muslim must also talk to the Hindus, to the Buddhist, to the Taoist, to the Confucian and others. As Asian we must celebrate diversity. Let Huntington conjure a spectre of clash of civilization, but Asian will partake in a feast of civilizations.

To partake in the feast of civilization one has to love civilization. To love civilization one has to love ideas. One cannot live without ideas. Primitive societies became a civilization because they produce ideas – ideas about man, about society, about truth, about justice, and about beauty. We recognize a civilization because they produced men and women who live, in what is called by Hannah Arendt as “the life of ideas.”

We cannot think of the classical Greek without thinking about Plato. We cannot think of India without thinking of Shankaracharya or Ramanuja, or Islamic civilization without thinking Ibn Sina or Ibn Khaldun, al Biruni or Waliullah Dehlawi. We cannot think of China without thinking of Wang Yang Ming or the great reformer Wang An Shih. These thinkers, or men of ideas, produce ideas for their civilizations. These ideas differentiate their civilization with other civilizations, but also ideas that connect one civilization with others.

One of the greatest mind of the twentieth century, Alfred North Whitehead, said that the decisive moment when man progressed from barbarity to civilization is when man move from reliance from the use of force to reliance on the use of persuasion. From force to persuasion, this is the decisive mind of man, but they did not do it through armies. They do it through persuasion. They do not conquer by the might of arms, but through the arsenals of their arguments.

This particular idea of Whitehead, an American philosopher, is profoundly relevant in our time, especially as a commentary to initiative to promote democracy. Undoubtedly democracy is one of the greatest human achievements. Democracy is about freedom and choice, to be free from tyranny and oppression about participation in governance. Of all political organization known experimented by man, democracy is the only system that rely on persuasion rather than force. As such it is troubling to any passionate democrat that democracy as a political system that is defined by persuasion could be introduced by force. It is a contradiction in terms, at least theoretically, that you can spread freedom through occupation.

I believe that man by nature wants to be free. To be un-free, be it under slavery, or colonialism, or dictatorship, and other forms of political tyranny are unacceptable. We want to make our own choice. We do not want to be forced to make our choice. We want to make our choice freely.

We have the recent experience of Indonesia where the transition to democracy is truly liberating. It comes from the will and fortitude of the Indonesian, which is the biggest Muslim nation in the world, to free themselves from three decades of military dictatorship. It also comes from the desire of the Indonesians to resume their experiment in democracy, begun in 1945, but sabotaged by Sukarno's "guided democracy", and later supplanted by Suharto's New Order militarism. The new Indonesian experiment has rendered the debate whether Islam is compatible with democracy or not completely irrelevant.

Even here in India, the experience in freedom and democracy is no less enriching. India remains and will remain the biggest democracy in the world until the Chinese decide to join the community democracies. It is also in the Sufis and the Yogis, philosophers and panditas, exchanged ideas, intellectual discoveries and spiritual experiences. Some three hundred years ago Prince Dara Shikoh described this dialogue as the "meeting of two oceans" – *maja' ul bahrian*. The translations of Hindus texts into Persian which he commissioned later on facilitated the Western discovery of Indian thought.

Be that as it may, India also faces grave challenges. The challenges of India – Hindus, Muslims and Christians – are not for India alone. India must face these challenges on behalf of Asian democracies. Deeply religious society have fanatics in their midst. As such India has to battle fanatics and obscurantists on the fringe that intend to subvert its democracy. Only through a continuous and vigorous dialogue of civilizations India could prevent its democracy being hijacked by religious fascists. India has its cultural richness, intellectual profundity and spiritual depth. If it could employ these resources, through persuasion rather than force, in battling the madcap on fringe India could pave the way towards a new global *covivencia*, a life of tolerance, understanding and mutual enrichment.

Even the West will have to learn something from this. The coming of Enlightenment in Europe in the eighteenth century sought to free man from superstition, fanaticism and bigotry through the instrument of reason. The light of reason which has grown dimmed in the Islamic and other Asian civilizations, gained a new source in the West, and eventually persuaded the rest of the world to rediscover this miracle called human intellect. It is an enigma to the Asians, who are still re-learning to be rational, to find out that the residue of fanaticism and bigotry in the West has gained a new vigour. As such the battle against bigotry and religious fanaticism and fascism

is not only the concern of the East. The West also must have the resolve to battle their own fanatics.

Business Session-I

Theme: "Relevance & need for understanding the essence of religious traditions in the contemporary world"



Chairperson:
Dr. Abdullah Omar Nasseef



Speakers:

Swami Agnivesh (Hinduism), Mr. Valson Thampu (Christianity), Prof. Samdhong Rinpoche (Buddhism),
Dr. Gurbhagat Singh (Sikhism), Dr. Yoong Suan (Chinese Civilisation), Dr. S.L Gandhi (Jainism),
Prof. M. Nejatullah Siddiqi (Islam)

Business Session-II

Theme: "Role of Religion in harnessing creative energies and fostering a culture of peaceful co-existence"



Chairperson:
Dr. Jamal M Al-Barzinji



Speakers:
Mr. John Dayal, Dr. Gulab Kothari, Dr. Rehana Tariq, Prof. I. H. Siddiqui

Business Session-III

Theme: "Relevance of India's composite Civilisational Legacy in promoting dialogue & reconciliation"



Chairperson:

Prof. Manzoor Ahmad

Speakers:

Dr. Dharampal, Dr. M. M Verma, Prof. M.H Qureshi, Prof. A.R Momin

Business Session-IV

Theme: "Role of Women in making a humane civilisation"



Chairperson:

Prof. Abdul Raheem

Speakers:

Mrs. Uzma Nahid, Prof. Haseena Hashia, Dr. Reeta Bagchi, Maulana Khalid Saifullah Rahmani

Business Session-V

Theme: "Role of Ulema in making a humane civilisation"

**Chairperson:**

Mufti Zafeeruddin A.Miftahi

Speakers:

MI. Khalid Saifullah Rahmani, MI. Saud Alam Qasmi, MI. Atiq Ahmad Bastai, MI. Habeeb Rehan Nadvi,
MI. Sultan Ahmad Islahi

Business Session-VI

Theme: "Role of Youth in making a humane civilisation"



Chairperson:
Prof. Z. M. Khan

Speakers:
Dr. Abdulwahab Noorwali, Dr. Ishtiyaque Danish

Business Session-VII

Theme: "The Challenges, impediments and prospects relating to inter-civilisational dialogue in the global, multi-cultural scenario"



Chairperson:
Dr. Anwar Ibrahim



Speakers:

Dr. Antony T. Sullivan, Prof. T.K Oommen, Dr. Shamil Z. Sulttanov, Dr. Abdul Wahab Noorwali, Dr. Yoong Suan, Dr. Ausaf Ahmad

Valedictory Session



Chairperson: Dr. Jamal M Al-Barzinji

Presidential Remarks: Justice A. M. Ahmadi

Valedictory: Dr. Abdullah Omar Nasseef

Remarks: Dr. Adel Al-Falah, Dr. M. Manzoor Alam

Resolution: Prof. Z.M. Khan

Thanks: Prof. M. A. Quddus

Group Photographs



Resolutions:

International Conference on “Inter-Civilisational Dialogue in a Globalising World” organised in New Delhi under the auspices of the Institute of Objective Studies, New Delhi on 8-10 April, 2005 sought to highlight the imperative of inter-religious, inter-cultural and inter-civilisational dialogue and cooperation in the context of a rapidly globalising world. It noted that the process of globalising has brought into relief the scale and ramifications of political, social and ethnic conflicts across the world and their horrifying consequences. At the same time, globalisation has also afforded, thanks to the incredible advances in information and communication technologies, enormous opportunities and prospects for interaction, exchange and cooperation among different peoples, cultures and civilisations.

In the light of the presentations made at the conference and the deliberations and discussions that followed, the following resolutions were approved by the delegates and participants.

1. There is an urgent need to harness the creative potential and energies of religious traditions in the service of global peace and harmonious coexistence among different peoples, religious communities and ethnic groups. An important prerequisite of inter-civilisational dialogue is creating and sustaining an atmosphere of mutual trust, compassion and humanism.
2. Asian religious and cultural traditions have made an enormous contribution to inter-religious tolerance, peaceful coexistence and cultural synthesis. This continuing legacy has immense relevance and salience for inter-cultural and inter-civilisational dialogue, which needs to be projected and highlighted in the contemporary world.
3. In order to broaden the base of inter-cultural understanding and dialogue and to disseminate the message of inter-cultural and inter-religious harmony and amity among large sections of the society, there should be the widest possible cooperation and collaboration among institutions and agencies that are engaged in promoting inter-cultural understanding at different levels and in different parts of the world. This has become necessary in the context of the growing importance of the institutions of civil society.
4. Modern information and communication technologies should be harnessed for disseminating the message of inter-cultural understanding and harmonious coexistence and for networking with like-minded individuals, institutions and NGOs. It will be fruitful to start a website for the purpose of fostering intercultural, inter-religious and inter-civilisational dialogue and reconciliation.

5. The Conference recommends the setting up of a Centre for Inter-Cultural Dialogue and Reconciliation at New Delhi, which will serve as a nodal agency for addressing the concerns articulated at the conference.

Talk on Dialogue Among Civilizations an Arab Perspective

March 14, 2008

Organized by

INSTITUTE OF OBJECTIVE STUDIES



**L-R: Mr. Sadek Jawad Sulaiman, Former Ambassador of Oman to US & Iran delivering his talk,
also seen in the picture Prof. A. K. Pasha & Prof. Z. M. Khan**

New Delhi, March 14: The need for dialogue among civilisations has increased in the troubled 21st century, said Mr Sadeq Jawad Sulaiman, a thinker from Oman. Mr Sulaiman, who had been ambassador of his country to the US and Iran, was speaking at the headquarters of Institute of Objective Studies here today.

He said Samuel P. Huntington formulated the thesis of clash of civilisations some 15 years ago. According to Mr Huntington, in the 21st century there would be no clash between countries, but between civilisations. The thesis was challenged by then Iranian President Mohammad Khatami in the United Nations in 2000.

Mr Sulaiman said Khatami's viewpoint was very clear and straightforward. Since then the world started talking of dialogue among civilisations. "All my life I will be advancing the culture of dialogue among civilisations", he said. There was a marked difference between inter-civilisational dialogue and inter-religious dialogue, he clarified.



Dr. Ausaf Ahmad (R) presenting a memento to H. E. Mohammed Yousuf Dawood Shalwani, Ambassador of Oman to India

“A religion firmly stands on its beliefs, which remain unaltered even in the event of dialogue. On the other hand, civilisations learn from each other, and their stances, preferences and aversions keep changing”, Mr Sulaiman observed.

He said a civilisation is based on culture. And a culture is a dynamic and changing thing. This way a civilisation keeps evolving and changing. In this situation the prospects of inter-civilisational dialogue are high. Referring to Mohammad Khatami, Mr Sulaiman said dialogue has the potential to remove misunderstandings, and civilisations are there to bring peoples together, not for starting a clash.

The speech was followed by an interesting question-answer session. The programme was conducted by Prof. A.K. Pasha of Jawaharlal Nehru University.



A view of Audience

Former head of Jamia Millia Islamia's political science department Prof. Z.M. Khan asked whether dialogue was a means to a better world or an end in itself. Mr Sulaiman replied that inter-civilisational dialogue, by its very nature, had to be a means only.

When one young man went off on a tangent regarding Islam having produced great science and art in the Medieval Age "while Europe was still wallowing in the ignorance of Dark Ages", Mr Sulaiman told him politely that dialogue had to be couched in more meaningful, less triumphalist language.

To another question he sounded the cautionary note that in the civilisational dialogue too frequent resort to one's own religion might sabotage the whole idea of dialogue. He quoted the Prophet's (PBUH) advice to Muslims that they were free to work out non-religious issues without recourse to Islam.

LECTURE ON INTER-FAITH DIALOGUE: ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

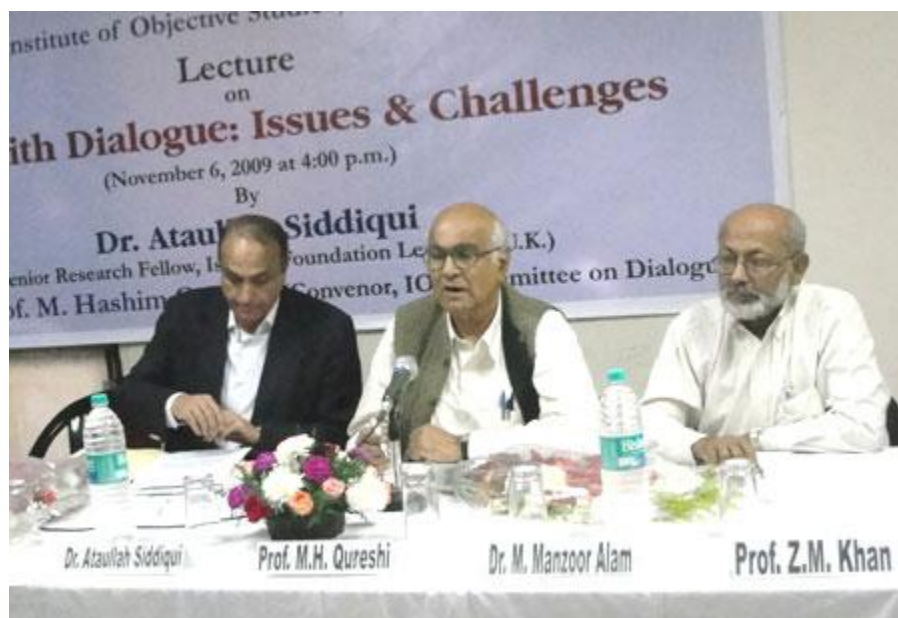
November 6, 2009

Organized by

INSTITUTE OF OBJECTIVE STUDIES

New Delhi, November 6: Europe is steeped in Christian, Judeo-Christian and secular-liberal traditions. Newer immigrants who came in to settle in these countries, bringing in their own religio-cultural traditions, would have to understand this context to have a fruitful dialogue with them.

These views were expressed by Dr Ataullah Siddiqui at the IOS Convention Centre here last evening in a lecture titled "Inter-faith Dialogue: Issues and Challenges". Dr Siddiqui is a senior research fellow at the Islamic Foundation in Leicester, assistant director of the Markfield Institute of Higher Education and a visiting fellow in the Centre for the History of Religious and Political Pluralism, University of Leicester in England.



L-R: Dr Ataullah Siddiqui, Prof. MH Qureshi, Dr Mohammad Manzoor Alam

He traced the history of inter-faith dialogue by briefly describing three stages of the inter-faith movement. The United States of America celebrated the fourth centenary of the discovery of the Americas by Columbus (1492) in 1892. The diverse religious communities that settled America also celebrated the diversity of their faith in 1893 by organising a Parliament of World Religions (which

witnessed Swami Vivekananda's fascinating presentation of Hindu belief and worship). He said the Parliament of World Religions would meet again next month in Australia.



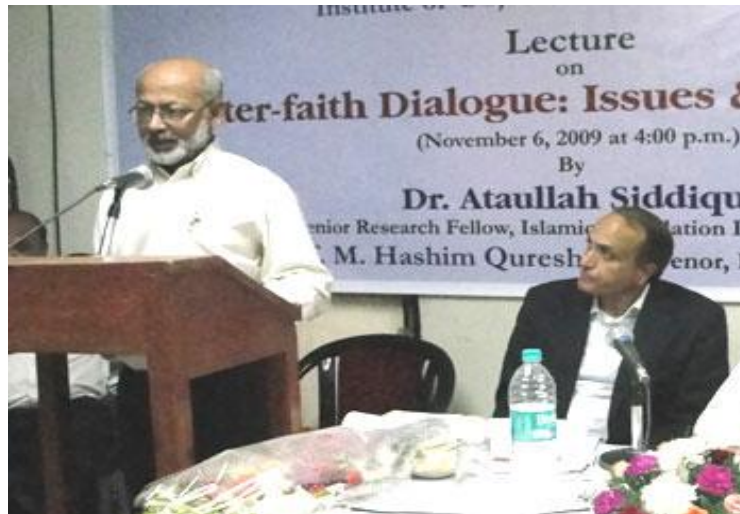
Speaker: Dr Ataulah Siddiqui

The second stage in inter-faith dialogue movement was the creation of International Council for Unitarian and other Religions in 1900. That was another significant advance in the inter-faith movement.

Then, at the height of the Cold War, the Japanese, "who did not want another Hiroshima", took the lead in initiating another programme for peace using the agency of religion. Thus in Kyoto (Japan) the World Council of Religions for Peace came up in 1970.

The issues, from a European perspective (where Dr Farooqui works) are related to integration and fruitful co-existence of people from other faith backgrounds in the majority's Judeo-Christian and Hellenic-secular liberal milieu.

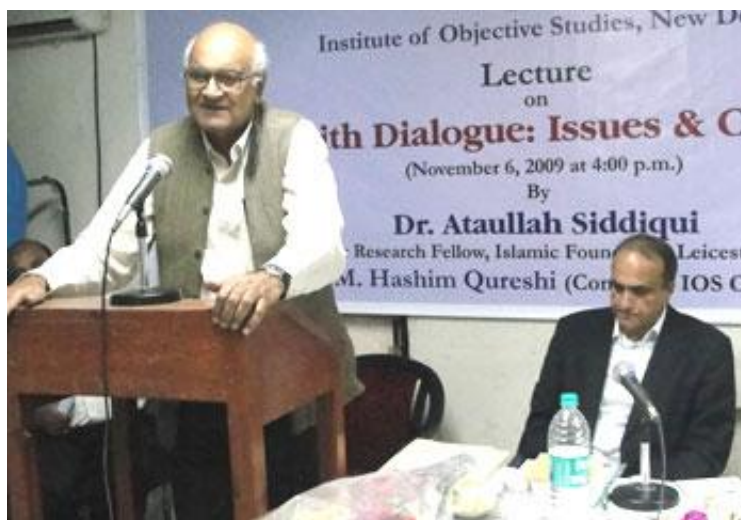
The results of a failure in dialogue is conflict that could be as horrendous as the Nazi Holocaust involving Jews and the Serb decimation of Bosnian and Kosovar Muslims. He pointed out that the Bosnians and Kosovars were not even immigrants like most British, French or German Muslims, but indigenous people. That shows the relevance and urgency of an interfaith dialogue.



Speaker: Dr Mohammad Manzoor Alam

He said Islam recognises the value of aadat (cultural practices) and urf (usage) which makes dialogue with other faith communities easier. Among the challenges he counted the bad press that inter-faith dialogue had got among Muslims. The misperception among many Muslims was that inter-faith dialogue meant giving up one's faith in Islam. He clarified that there could be no inter-faith dialogue until both sides had their faith. "No inter-faith without faith", he asserted.

Another challenge, he said, was the lack of proper education among Muslims regarding other people's faith. There were few experts of other people's faiths and cultural traditions among Muslims, contrary to Christendom, which had a large number of experts on Islam, Buddhism, Jainism and other faiths, besides experts in Arabic and Turkish language and culture, among others.



Speaker: Prof. MH Qureshi

Inter-faith dialogue also involves youth, women, families and communities, he said. He described several experiences of Muslim-Christian dialogue in Europe which had helped in improving mutual relations. European Christians had been generous with their time and funds, without trying to use the opportunity for partisan ends.

The convener of the lecture programme at IOS, Prof. MH Qureshi, said India was in a greater need for such dialogue than Europe as "this country is more diverse" in religion and ethnicity.

The IOS Chairman Dr Mohammad Manzoor Alam said the institute had been organising national and international seminars and conferences over the years. The IOS had not only been holding meets on inter-faith dialogue, but intra-faith debates as well.

The IOS has organised a string of seminars this year that are an exercise in trying to understand Islam in the present context and at present level of human knowledge.

The programme was conducted by Prof Ishtiyaque Danish. At the end of it a lively question and answer session ensued.

SPEECH DELIVERED BY DR MOHAMMAD MANZOOR ALAM, CHAIRMAN, IOS DURING 11TH DOHA INTERFAITH DIALOGUE CONFERENCE ON \diamond ROLE OF YOUTH IN ENHANCING THE VALUE OF DIALOGUE \diamond HELD AT DOHA, QATAR ON MARCH 25-26, 2014 IN PLENARY SESSION-I ON RELIGIOUS PERSPECTIVE ON YOUTH



ROLE OF YOUTH IN ENHANCING THE VALUE OF DIALOGUE: AN INDIAN PERSPECTIVE

By



DR MOHAMMAD MANZOOR ALAM

**Chairman, Institute of Objective Studies
New Delhi (India)**

WHAT DIALOGUE REALLY IS

We have first to know what dialogue is *not*, before coming down to what dialogue *is*. And from there we have to proceed to placing it in its historical perspective and see how in today's context the youth can have a role of enhancing its value.

So, first what dialogue is not. Dialogue is not about establishing a “we versus they” equation and creating a hegemony for *our* own ideas vis-à-vis *their* ideas. It is not about creating a hierarchy of ideas.

It is also not about an exchange of blames nor for trading of charges. Additionally, dialogue is not about agreement or disagreement.

Now, what dialogue is. It is a healing process. A warm, human gesture. An open-ended exchange of ideas without forcing anyone to take a certain position or insisting on anyone to take a stand.

IOS ROLE

Over the years, the Institute of Objective Studies (IOS), headquartered in New Delhi, has contributed to this process with its own international seminars and symposia on interfaith, inter-civilisational dialogue. In the meanwhile, we have had similar conferences on inter-community linkages within India, communities here meaning faith and ethnic communities.

Besides these we have held international conferences on the issues of youth within and outside India. In India the population of persons between 15 and 19 years is 250 million. If we include persons up to 25 years, the number crosses 300 million. You can imagine the scale and potential of our young population.

With so much energy and enthusiasm available, the country is set to harvest a great demographic dividend. In the case of India (like China) a huge population base is an asset, not a liability as the Malthusian economists of the 50s and 60s feared. India has an edge in one sense over China. Its population has grown at more than double the rate of China over the last three decades as China has observed one-child norm over the decades. The result is that China does not have enough youth compared to the ageing population, which the younger generation has to support.

The fears of a “youth bulge” (which, according to demographers and other experts, leads to war, mass violence, political upheaval and civil unrest) have not come true in India. The Muslim world as a whole has remained peaceful (except for external aggression and civil strife in a few countries) despite the fact that a large proportion of the Muslim world is youthful, with a population of 780 million persons below 25 years of age.

The youth are not a liability if we do not waste them and keep them unhealthy, uneducated and untrained. I would leave the youth thread here to be picked up soon. Meanwhile, I would digress a little to talk for a couple of minutes about some of our past programmes on inter-civilisational and allied issues over the years attended by ministers, judges and intellectuals from India and abroad.

OUR TRACK RECORD

In October 2008, we organised an international conference on “Towards Human Understanding Through Dialogue” in New Delhi with an impressive representation of religious leaders of Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism and Jainism from India and several other countries.

In 2009, the IOS organised a lecture by Dr Ataullah Siddiqui. The lecture was titled “Interfaith Dialogue: Issues and Challenges” and it left a deep impression on a highly-educated audience. Another similar talk that left a deep impression and set people thinking was “Dialogue Among Civilisations: An Arab Perspective” in 2008.

A major national seminar was held by the IOS on “Fostering Inter-Community Linkages in India” in 2003.

One of our most widely covered conferences was “Inter-Civilisational Dialogue in a Globalising World” in 2005 that was attended by India’s Prime Minister and half a dozen of his cabinet colleagues, judges, intellectuals, academics and foreign dignitaries like Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, former deputy prime minister of Malaysia.

With a rich and diverse background like this the IOS, whose Chairman I happen to be, should be able to contribute to the present discourse.

BACK TO YOUTH

To pick up the thread on youth (and its role in enhancing the value of interfaith dialogue that we had left a moment ago, let us begin with the assertion that today’s youth are the leaders of tomorrow. Full of buoyant energy, hope and enthusiasm, the youth also have time on their side. On the other hand, the older generation has experience and wisdom to share with them. This is a nice combination. Nice and fortuitous.

As today’s youth are going to be the leaders of tomorrow, it is important for Muslim youth to join the interfaith dialogue on way to maturing into future leaders. It is important for our youth to remember that the current phase of the dialogue was initiated in the wake of extraordinary Islam-baiting. Everyday the Western media was full of anti-Islam messages. It was quite evident that all this was not a spontaneous phenomenon, but some hostile groups were deliberately forcing an Islam versus West confrontation through heavily drumming up Islamophobia.

Our youth must realise that as the responsibility of practising Islam, it is also their responsibility to establish peaceful relations with other faith groups on the basis of mutual understanding through dialogue and co-operation for common good. Protecting the fair name of Islam is as incumbent on the youth as on the elder generation.

So far the need for such dialogue has firmly been established. The intensified dialogue since 2008 has certainly reduced the Islam-baiting level in Western media even as the Western confrontation with some Muslim nations is yet to cease completely.

Our youth have to remember that the Quran clearly describes the single human family of classes, creeds, colours and castes as the children of a single pair of primordial parents. This being the case, it requires that as followers of Islam we try to establish dialogue across races and religions in the family of Adam and Eve (peace be upon them). The first tangible result is a visible decline in the level of Islamophobia. We must insist on such result as a proof of sincerity and success of such dialogue.

As religions we have family values and a morally ordered world as commonly-shared goals. We thus can come together on preventing the ruin of the institution of family because of live-in relationships, lesbianism, gay movement, bisexuality and transvestitism. Some humane, democratically-approved and non-violent way of forestalling this trend has to be found out by leaders of major faiths and the practical example of our youth.

THE ROAD AHEAD

The youth, including the Muslim youth, are uniquely positioned in life to be able to influence the course of events and shape the very spirit of the age. Being the largest component of the workforce, the youth have the greatest opportunity to mix with and interact with each other across faiths, nationalities and races.

The same holds good for colleges and universities, bureaucracies and armed forces across the world. In those areas of life religious and sectarian differences are muted and de-emphasised as fellow-feeling is high. In those circles of mainly youthful people the idea of interfaith understanding will readily take root if we work towards it with sincerity and dedication.

The Muslim youth must insist on certain basics: no Islam baiting as Muslims are required to respect other people's prophets and other religious figures. Dialogue must go on as it is required by Islamic principles. As per the Qur'anic injunction and the Prophet's (PBUH) example, Muslims must work with others for common causes and common good.

In addition, our youth (and elders) must remain sensitive to, and supportive of, others in their moment of sorrow. We must come to the aid of people hit by natural catastrophe, civil wars, extreme poverty, illiteracy and disease without making any distinction between Muslims and non-Muslims.

As Muslims we must recognise that we lack cadres of trained disaster-management workers, food workers, social activists and human rights workers. Merely by making their presence felt in these areas the Muslim youth will not just be empowered, but get connected with humanity across faiths and ethnicities. That will enhance the value of interfaith dialogue.

IN ESSENCE

The forces of globalisation today, and the forces of history always, generate certain negative features like racial and nationalist ideas of supremacy, brutal power play, economic and social inequality, injustice and loss of human dignity.

The focus of all future dialogue should be the elimination of the above features from our social and political lives. Dialogue is about the establishment of justice, equality, liberty and human dignity. This is what the Islamic spirit calls for and other major religions would certainly agree upon.

Sometimes it is racial supremacist hubris disguised as religion that creates an unjust order. If we believe that certain people are born to rule and others to be ruled, we can never hope to achieve an equal, just and fair order. If we allow racial supremacist ideas to rule the world we will never have an equal world. The youth have to imbibe these values.

An important goal of such dialogue is the creation of a humane world. If justice is denied to oppressed people we will never attain peace. Peace will also elude us as long as the gap between the rich and poor keeps widening. These issues must never be forgotten in dialogue as they are the foundation of dignified human life. The youth have to lend support to this vision.

YOUTH DIALOGUE: WE ALSO HAVE SOMETHING TO SAY

February 20, 2016 at IOS Calicut chapter



Calicut: IOS Calicut chapter of the Institute of Objective Studies conducted a youth dialogue with the theme 'WE ALSO HAVE SOMETHING TO SAY' on 20th February 2016 at Islamic Youth Centre auditorium, Kozhikode. Around 30 youths, both men and women, attended the programme to air their views, anxieties and hopes about Indian Muslims as well as Muslims in other parts of the world. The participants were drawn from various fields.



There were students, journalists, research scholars, leaders of different youth and student organisations, teachers, e-activists, etc. The dialogue started with an introduction of A A Vahab, secretary IOS, Calicut Chapter. He quoted extensively from the Quran, to underline the importance of youth in Islam and told the gathering about crucial role they had to play in future in helping the community to overcome its hurdles.



Prof. P Koya, coordinator of the chapter, said that Indian Muslims had to take benefit of the democratic advantage to lead not only themselves, but the nation. According to the Census Report of 2011, 47% of Muslim population in India were young and in their most productive age. He also said that it was the first of such dialogues in the state.



C. Dawood, executive editor of Media One TV, and Rafeeq Kuttikkattoor, the vice principal of Green Valley Academy, Manjery, were members of the presidium which moderated the discussion. IOS insisted that the delegates were free to share their views. V M Fahad proposed a vote of thanks.