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Inter-Religious Dialogue in India with Special Reference to Islam: Positions, Experiences and Reflections

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1. Introduction

As both time and space at hand for this presentation** is limited, therefore instead of a longer introductory note, here a move is made to deal with the given subject straight. In the second section the background both historical and theological is discussed, which win state the position of the inter-religious dialogue in India. The third section will deal with the involvement and experiences of the Roman Catholic and Protestant churches in the field of inter-religious dialogue. The fourth section deals with other living religions specially Islam. Finally in section five concluding remarks are given in the form of reflections and in section six, the notes and references are listed.

2. Background of Inter-religious Dialogue In India

This section is divided in two parts. Part one, deals with the history and part two with the theology of the inter-religious dialogue.

2.1. History

In India in some form the 'dialogue' among the followers of various religions is going on from the ancient time. This process can be seen influencing different religious traditions, both positively and negatively even among the Rigvedic people, the age of which has been estimated around 3000 BC to 1500 BC. For example immolation of women on the funeral pyre of the husband originally belonged to non-Vedic people, but through their encounter, the Vedic people accepted this practice [1]. In the same way the St.Thomas Christians of Kerala in India, through their living encounter with the surrounding religious communities, accepted a number of religious rituals and customs, which have now become a part of their religious and liturgi-

cal life [2]. But it is also true in ancient times, neither the term 'dialogue' was used, nor the conscious organised efforts were made on the line of the present understanding of the inter-religious dialogue.

In the modern sense, the inter-religious dialogue, for the first time in the history of India, began at the time of the great Mughal Muslim emperor Akbar, who ascended the throne on 14, February, 1556 and ruled till October, 1605. Emperor Akbar was brought up in the atmosphere of liberal outlook of his father and grand father Humayun and Babar respectively. He also came into contact from his early youth with Muslim Sufis (mystics) like Mubarak and his sons. Sufis always had liberal views about the Hindu religion, particularly of Vedantic thoughts. With this kind of mystic influence, Akbar developed a very positive interest in other religions [3].

Akbar, in order to pursue his multi-religious interests in 1575 constructed a special new building at Fatehpur Sikh named as Ibadatkhana (worship place), where he invited scholars and religious leaders to hold religious discussions. His invitees included scholars of different religions, Hindus, Jains, Parsis, Christians and Muslims from all parts of the country. At one time to the assembled scholars, he said: "My sole object, Oh Wise Mullas! is to ascertain truth, to find out and disclose the principles of genuine religion, and to trace it to the divine origin: Take care, therefore, that through the influence of your human passions you are not induced to conceal the truth: and say nothing contrary to the almighty decrees. If you do, you are responsible before God for the consequences of your impiety" [4].

About the nature of dialogue or discussion which took place at Ibadatkhanna, a historian Al-Badaoni says: "The learned men used to draw the sword of the tongue on the battlefield of mutual contradiction and opposition, and the antagonism of the sects reached such a pitch that they would call one another fools and heretics. The controversies used to pass beyond the differences of Sunni and Shia, of Hanafi and Shafi, of lawyer and divine, and they would attack the very basis of belief "[5].

One of the well known Muslim authors of Akbar's time was Abul Fadl, who was commissioned by the emperor to write about his work. Abul Fadl wrote the famous work known as 'Ain-i-Akbari' (mirror of Akbar's works). In the preface of 'Ain-i-Akbari' Abul Fadl wrote, in order that "hostility towards them (Hindus) might abate and the temporal sword be stayed awhile from the shedding of blood, that discussions within and without be turned into peace and the thornbrake of strife and enmity bloom into garden of concord. Assemblies for discussion could then be formed and gatherings of science suitably covered"[6].

The person who needs a special mention here in the 'dialogue' history of India is Prince Muhammad Dara Shikuh, the eldest son of emperor Shah Jahan and great grandson of Akbar, who was born on March 20, A.D. 1615 and was put to death by his brother Aurangzeb by declaring him as Kafir (heretic) in August A.D. 1659. In A.D. 1640 Dara was initiated into the Qadiri group of Sufi. Besides his close association with Sufis such as Mian Mir and Mulla Shah Badakhshi, he was also in touch with a Hindu mystic, Baba Lal Das, whom he first met in AD 1653 after which as part of his pursuit for the Truth he had seven illuminating dialogues with him [7].

Dara in 1657 translated the fifty two Upanishads from Sanskrit into Persian under the title 'Sirr-i-Akbar' (The (Great Secret) at Delhi. His main objective was to understand philosophical and theological doctrines of Hindu religion. According to Dara, Upanishads contained the essence of monotheism which he regarded as divine secret of the protected book. He even

quoted from the Holy Quran a verse to support his assertion, which reads: "Most surely this is the honoured Quran; it is the book that is protected. None shall touch it save the purified ones. A revelation by the Lord of the worlds" (LVI, 77-80) [8].

'Sirr-i-Akbar' of Dara Shikuh was translated in A.D. 1882 by Anquetil Duperron into Latin. From Latin in the same year Franz Mischel translated into German. About the importance of Dara's work and these translations Bikrama Jit Hasrat says: "Whatever the shortcoming of Dara Shikuh's Persian translation, its importance lies in the fact that, although it was originally meant for 'the spiritual benefit of his own self, his children, his friends and seekers of Truth', when the Upanishads were once translated from Sanskrit into Persian, at that time, the most widely read language of the East and understood likewise by many European scholars, they became generally accessible to all, who took an interest in the religious literature of India"[9].

Among the early pioneers in the area of dialogue particularly Muslim-Christian, some of the Christian missionaries as well as Muslim individuals who played a role include: Henry Martyn (1781 1812), who was willing to accept whatever best in his Muslim acquaintances and also accepted the same as 'the activity of God'; G.A.Lefroy (1854-1919), who made efforts to search the positive religious message of Islam; Saiyed Ahmad Khan (1817-1898), who laid emphasis on the point that Muslims should view positively the main message of all authentic scriptures and Fr. Victor Courtuis SJ (1907-1960), who laid stress on the objective study of the Holy Quran [10].

The history of the inter-religious dialogue in India in the present sense particularly in the case of the role of Christians have been influenced by both outside and inside historical happenings and sources. In the case of the Roman Catholic Church, the major influence came from the Vatican Council II's positive approach in 1965, which the Council had shown toward other religions including Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam, by saying: "The Catholic Church rejects nothing of what is true and holy in these religions ... The Church, therefore, urges her sons to enter with prudence and charity into discussion and collaboration with members of other religions. Let Christians, while witnessing to their own faith and way of life acknowledge, preserve and encourage the spiritual and moral truths found among non-Christians, also their social life and culture"[11].

Prior to Vatican Council II, in India a Roman Catholic convert Brahmabandhab Upadhyay, who came from a Bengali priestly caste and became Christian in February 1891, had sown the seed of inter-religious dialogue by declaring: "By birth we are Hindus... by virtue of our sacramental rebirth, we are Catholics"[12]. Upadhyay's approach later in some form was followed by other Catholic scholars, which included P.Johanns, G.Dandoy, V.Courtouis, R.Antoine, P.Fallon, J.Monchain and Swami Abhishiktananda [13]. There were numbers of consultations and seminars also that took place, among which the most important, the All India Seminar were held in Bangalore during 1969; the International Theological Conference on Evangelisation, Dialogue and Development in Nagpur during 1971; All India Consultation on Evangelisation in Patna during 1971 and finally the General Meeting of the Catholic Bishops' Conference in India (C.B.C.I.) in 1974 at Calcutta, gave a call to the Church in India to be pioneer in inter-religious dialogue, because "it is in the response of Christian faith to God's saving presence in other religious traditions and the expression of the firm hope of their fulfilment in Christ."[14].

In some way the Christians belonging to various Protestant traditions have similar history. Because the world body, representing major Protestants and Orthodox traditions namely the

World Council of Churches (W.C.C.), has been influencing the state of inter-religious dialogue in India. But it is also true in some areas of dialogue that the major contributions are made by the Indian Christians as part of the development of ecumenical and inter-religious dialogue history.

But unlike the Roman Catholic Church in India having one central body, the Catholic Bishops' Conference in India (C.B.C.I.), the Protestants do not have any central body except the National Council of Churches (N.C.C.I.) to which most of the major Protestant churches are affiliated as member churches along with Orthodox tradition. And N.C.C.I. has placed a similar role like C.B.C.I. (though limited in sense) in encouraging both the member churches as well as the research institutes in the area of inter-religious dialogue. For example to begin, it was N.C.C.I., which started the present Henry Martyn Institute in Islamic Studies in 1930 with one of the specific objectives to study and research of Islam with special reference to the Indian context [15]. Again it was N.C.C.I. which felicitated the formation of the Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society (C.I.S.R.S) between 1953-1957, which later on became one of the main sources of development of the interfaith dialogue in India [16].

But behind the initiatives of N.C.C.I. and the works of various institutes such as C.I.S.R.S. and Henry Martyn Institute, there is quite a history of a long-standing concern with dialogue, which goes parallel with the ecumenical history of the Church. Now it is not going to be possible to deal with this long history of development, because of the size of this presentation. Here only few highlights are given.

One of the major historical factors behind the development of dialogue is the one, which P.D.Devanandan had pointed out in his work on 'Preparation for Dialogue' and 'Christian Concern in Hinduism', the religious revivalism, which begins around the early decades of the 19th century, particularly among the followers of Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam. The reason behind this revivalism was the works of missionaries and the various conversion movements. According to P.D.Devanandan, at that time each of these religions started claiming independently that it has the answer to the world's problems where Christian religion has failed, but at the same time, the plea was also put forward that the followers of all religions should work for a peaceful coexistence. In this revivalism the followers of every religion also became socially conscious [17]. The various movements such as Brahmo Samaj and Arya Samaj were the outer manifestations of this renaissance and revivalism.

The above developments forced the Christian missionaries and churches to rethink their approach to other religions and their mission work. Number of national and international conferences and consultations were held. The most well known are: (a) The World Missionary Conference at Edinburgh 1910 in which semi-liberal views were expressed. According to which, though it was mentioned that Christianity is the absolute, and Jesus Christ fulfils and supersedes all other religions, yet it was suggested that Christianity should be enriched by the treasure of other religions, (b) International Missionary Council of Jerusalem 1928, in which missionary imperialism was condemned and emphasis was laid on paying respect to the sentiments of the people of other religions, and (c) the third important International Missionary Council was held during 1938 at Tambaram, India. For this Council, the famous Dutch theologian Hendrik Kraemer of that time, belonging to the neo-Orthodox School produced a sizeable volume entitled 'The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World'. In short the thesis which this work put forward was that the revelation of God in Jesus Christ was absolute and final [18].

The above position was questioned by Indian scholars which included G.V.Job, P.Chenchiah, V.Chakkarai, D.M.Devasahayam, S.Jesudason, Eddy Asirvatham and A.N.Sudarisanam, who also brought a sizeable work entitled 'Rethinking Christianity in India' in 1938. In this work in his article on 'Jesus and Non-Christian Faiths', P.Chenchiah made their position very clear in the following words: "In Europe and other Christian countries, Christians see Jesus only. In the unique situation in India which determines the status and influence of Christianity, we see Jesus in the company of other founders of religions or saviours of men - Buddha, Rama, and Krishna. Christianity moves and has its being in the midst of life, active religions commanding the homage of millions and claiming, if human testimony counts for anything, to minister and sustain its followers in the struggle of life, giving them the faith to live and courage to die with hope for the future. In India, these religions are in numbers and influence such as to compel mutual attention and respect. The life and destiny of Christians has to be studied in this vital context."[19].

By looking very closely at the above opposing views, it is correct to conclude that the conflict between the liberal and neo-Orthodox theologians gave birth to inter-religious dialogue during the second half of the 20th century [20].

One of the outcomes of various ecumenical Conferences and Council was the formation of the World Council of Churches in 1948, which continues to help and encourage various member churches and councils all over the world including India to enter more and more in the process of inter-religious dialogue. Stewart E. Brown in his work 'Meeting in Faith' [21] has listed and described sixteen of the international and regional consultations, which W.C.C. organised between 1969-1989. Almost in all of these participants from, India, representing Muslim, Hinduism, Buddhism and Christianity have taken part, and these participations have also helped in encouraging the inter-religious dialogue work at the national level in India. W.C.C. in August 1968 appointed an Indian scholar Stanley J.Samartha as an Associate Secretary in the Department on Study in Mission and Evangelism, with. a special responsibility to pursue the study on the Word of God and the Living Faiths of Men. In January 1971 W.C.C. opened a new sub-unit 'Dialogue with Men of Living Faiths and Ideologies', which became a guiding force in the area of inter-religious dialogue including India [22]. This sub-unit later provided 'Guidelines on Dialogue with People of Living Faiths and Ideologies' [23] in 1979, which now is available in its 1990 revised form. In 1992 it has also issued a document, which though is not a policy document, yet it introduces issues on Christian-Muslim relations which need to be considered ecumenically [24].

2.1.2. Theology

As it has been noted in the previous section that in the present form inter-religious dialogue came into existence as a result of the encounter which occurs between two groups of Christian theologians (liberal and neo-orthodox) either through their writings or during various international conferences or councils. The same can be said about the theology of dialogue, because these historical encounters at different times on the whole issue of Christian 'mission' have given birth to this expression. For example about sixty years ago William Ernest Hocking (1873-1966) recognised the fact that all 'the living religion contains within itself the best of all others'. He of course made a distinction between 'religion' and 'faith', and said these should not be confused. He stressed the need of the reconception of all living religions including Christianity in order to reach this common religious dimension [25]. Here one can see the seeds of the theological basis of to-day's inter-religious dialogue.

The response to Hocking's thesis one finds in Hendrik Kraemer's work 'The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World'. This work is centred around the view of the revelation of God in Christ as absolute and unique. This is the main theme which Kraemer has discussed under his broader subject of Biblical realism. Christianity to him is the religion of revelation [26], where other religions according to him "the product of man's great efforts."[27] On the other hand the answer prepared by the Indian thinkers to Kraemer's above work in the form of "Rethinking Christianity in India" says: "In India, both to the Hindu thinker and the masses, all religions are equally true." According to Chakkarai, "It is a genuine conviction"[28]. The demand

of the thinkers of 'Rethinking Christianity in India' was that the doctrine of Christology should be rethought in the light of Indian religious context. This they very clearly stated in the preface of their work by saying, "This urge has also come from Indian bhaktas and lovers of Christ outside the Church, who have repeatedly demanded that Christ should be related to the great Indian religious heritage ..."[29]. This theological debate, which began right in the beginning of this century in some way, is still on, but it has already helped in clearing the Christian theological position with regard to the inter-religious dialogue.

But today the Christian churches have made their theological stand more clear on the question of dialogue. For example the Guidelines for inter-religious dialogue issued by the Catholic Bishops' Conference in India's Commission for Dialogue and Ecumenism are very clear on this matter. According to these Guidelines, the whole Christian life takes the form of dialogue as a response to God's own initiative to enter into dialogue with human being in His revelation in Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is dialogue in flesh [30]. These Guidelines clearly state": "The Word of God, His logos, constitutes therefore the ultimate basis of dialogue... There would be no Church without the interchange or that of the Word (dia-logos) that is of the heart of our faith. God's dialogue with the people is thus shared in the fellowship of the Church"[31].

'Guidelines on Dialogue with Living Faiths and Ideologies' W.C.C. takes the above theological position on dialogue still further when it says: "In dialogue Christians actively respond to the command to 'love God and your neighbour as yourself'. As an expression of love engagement in dialogue testifies to the love experienced in Christ. It is a joyful affirmation of life against chaos and a participation with all who allies of life in seeking the provisional goals of a better human community"[32].

In the above theological positions, in dialogue both taken by the C.B.C.I. Commission for Dialogue and Ecumenism as well as the later one by the World Council of Churches, the emphasis is on the theocentric way of understanding of the relationship of Christianity with o living religions instead of either ecclesiocentrism or Christocentrism. Here accordingly the ecclesiocentrism the human salvation is limited within the walls of visible Church and according to Christocentrisrn, the whole reality is seen in and through Christ. But on the other hand theocentrism is "an attempt to find, a common theological platform in dialogue with adherents of other faiths. It refers to the understanding of God as the source/author of all salvation. He is the Creator, He is the one who saves. He has manifold ways of saving man. Theocentrism is also based on the fact that Jesus himself is centred on his Father. He proclaimed himself as the way to the Father. Therefore, the mystery of Jesus Christ cannot be interpreted except theocentrically"[30].

In general the above theological position on dialogue is agreeable to the partners of dialogue belonging to other religions and they have also accepted the need of dialogue [34]. But still their own position from their religious point of views is not available, except few of the Mus-

lim scholars have made their theological position clear, which will be referred later (section 4.2).

3. Indian Church and Inter-religious Dialogue

In the case of the Indian Church and inter-religious dialogue, few important points need to be kept in view: one, the Church in India is placed in a multi-religious situation, therefore it has to involve not only in a bilateral dialogue process between Christian-Muslim (except in the case of specially dedicated Christian institutions as Henry Martyn), it has to be partner in most cases in the multireligious dialogue. This point will become clearer in the later discussion.

Two, the Indian Muslim partners have always been involved in the dialogue process w whenever they are invited. For example, Indian Muslim scholars have been involved almost in all the dialogue meetings and seminars organised by W.C.C. right from the beginning, which took place in different countries between 1969-1989 [35]. The Muslim participation in these international and regional gatherings has been very active and contributory. The active participation of Muslims will be seen in the next two sub-sections also.

3. 1. Roman Catholic Church

As it has been observed earlier in section 2.1 on 'history', both the missionaries as well as the Indian converts of Roman Catholic Church have been concerned in their relationship with the people of other living religions including Islam. But certainly the declaration made by Pope Paul VI during December 1964 in Bombay, to the representatives of various religions that: "We must meet not merely as tourists, but as pilgrims who set out to find out God - not in buildings of stone but in human hearts. Man must meet man, nation meet nation, as brothers and sisters, as children of God" [36] and Vatican II's positive approach to other religions [37], have helped the Roman Catholic Church in India to go much ahead as compared to others. This point becomes very clear from the works of the C.B.C.I. Commission for Dialogue and Ecumenism and the Islamic Studies Association, which briefly have been discussed in the next two sub-sections. But before dealing with the works of these two other organs of the Roman Catholic Church, mention should be made to two other well known Catholic institutions, which are involved actively with the whole area of dialogue.

Today there are a number of Roman Catholic theological colleges and seminaries, where teaching courses include the area of dialogue. One good example of such a college is Vidyajyoti, the Jesuit College of Theology in Delhi, which brings out a Journal after its own name 'Vidyajyoti' and this journal carries a number of discussions on various aspects of the interfaith dialogue [38]. The Indian Theological Association (of Roman theological Institutions and theologians) is the other Catholic Association, which has been playing an active role specially defining the theological nature and role of inter-religious dialogue. Seminars connected with the Association's twelfth and thirteenth annual meetings were specially devoted to the whole concern of inter-religious dialogue. Two small extracts from the conclusions of these annual meetings are given as example. The twelfth meeting's conclusion says: "The Christian Community in India is challenged today to enter more and more deeply into the praxis of dialogue, common commitments to and action for a better society,"[39] and the conclusion of the thirteenth meeting, the same concern takes further, but more theological in nature, when it says: "The identity of the Christian Community, like that of Christ, the man-for -the- other and man-with-the-other will be in its, relatedness to the rest of the human community"[40].

3. 1. 1. C.B.C.I. Commission for Dialogue and Ecumenism

The Dialogue Commission of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India (C.B.C.I.) has been working very actively since January 1973 with a full time Secretary in the person of Fr.Albert Hambiaparambil [41]. The Commission took the inspiration from Pope Paul VI's address referred already above. The Commission basically works among the church people helping them to understand the basic teaching of Islam (also other religions) and areas of misunderstanding as well as positive meeting points with Muslims. The Commission has also organised jointly with Henry Martyn Institute (H.M.I.) number of three days courses throughout the country.

The Commission has introduced a form of dialogue, what it calls 'live-together'. Here Christians and followers of other religions are brought together in prayer, meditation and shared reflection. They also discuss topics of common concerns. The first multi-lateral 'live-together' was held at Aligarh, the seat of the famous Muslim University from October'25-27, 1974. Total number of participants was 33, out of which 13 were Muslims. The Muslims here felt that this form of dialogue would help to foster better communal harmony.

Aligarh has kept the bold initiative alive. The local branch of the Inter-Faith Association in February 1979, brought at one occasion 40 Hindus, Muslims, Jains and Christians together for a spiritual week-end.

C.B.C.I. Commission for Dialogue and Ecumenism, first it encouraged Vidyajyoti to publish the Guidelines for inter religions Dialogue in 1977 and in 1989 the Commission itself published the second revised edition of the same.

3.1.2. Islamic Studies Association

In 1973 the Roman Catholic Church in India first time had a workshop devoted to 'Dialogue with Muslim' during its "All India Consultation on Evangelization" in Patna. At this workshop Sam Bhajjan, the Director of H.M.I. was present. Prior to this historic event in a similar consultation during 1969 in Bangalore, a demand was made for a Roman Catholic scholar be set aside to study the Muslim religion, social and culture life in India. The question was also discussed that either a research institute be set up by the Church or it should link up its efforts with H.M.I. During the workshop in 1973 three problems were identified for the implementation of such an idea namely mutual ignorance, inherited attitudes of prejudice and a general apathy towards establishing relations with Muslims'. And during this workshop resolutions were passed in favour of having such an institute and it was also recommended to C.B.C.I. "that preparations for the establishing of a centre of Islamic Studies should begin immediately and that it be opened as soon as the two qualified persons are ready to take up residence - latest by 1977."Another important consultation was held from 28-30, 1978 at Agra and during this consultation a definite need to foster Christian-Muslim relations in India was felt. From here they started working toward a more ready spirit towards the formation of Islamic Study Association (I.S.A), which finally was registered in Delhi on 29th March, 1984. To begin I.S.A. took on itself a task of ensuring that courses on Islam were given in seminaries regularly. I.S.A. also started its communication organ, a quarterly magazine named 'Salaam' (peace). Besides this basic task, the challenge I.S.A. has taken is to play a constructive and creative role in the area of 'Christian-Muslim' Dialogue. Fr.Paul Joackson, while writing on 'The Role of I. S.A.' says: "I.S.A. thus plays the role of pathfinder in the field of dialogue, where naked pioneer gradually gives way to mutual respect and collaboration, two absolutely

essential constitute elements of dialogue." Besides the active role of the members of I.S.A., it continues to also promote the concerns of inter-faith dialogue in every issue of 'Salaam'[42].

3.2. Protestant Church Traditions

Much has been said already about the background history as well as theological position and its development of the dialogue concept in sections 2. 1. and 2.1.2. Therefore there is a very little need of introductory remarks on the work of Protestant Church traditions in the area of inter-religious dialogue, except to say that Protestant churches' neither has a centralized commission like the Roman Catholic Church nor it has like Islamic Study Association. Protestant churches' role and concern can be seen through the activities undertaken by its various related institutions including Henry Martyn Institute (H.M.I.) which deals with the Christian-Muslim dialogue or relationship. The succeeding two sub-sections deals with the case of Protestant churches briefly.

3.2. 1. Examples of Protestant Church related Institutions

The first ecumenical institute which needs mention is the Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Study (C.I.S.R.S.) Bangalore (now it has a Delhi office also). The Institute came into existence in its final form in October 1957. The Institute's concern for the inter-religious dialogue can be seen through the content of its official Journal namely 'Religion and Society'. The journal has been dealing with the concern of inter-religious dialogue from the very beginning by publishing articles on dialogue. Two examples of earliest articles are: 'Common Grounds for Christian-Non- Christian Collaboration' by R.Panikkar (in Vol.V.No.2, June 1958) and 'Inter-Faith Dialogue and Spirituality', by Mar Sundar Rao (in Vol. XII., No. 1, March 1965). Panikkar in his above article on the basis of relationship with other religions says: "The relation of non-Christian religions with Christianity is not the use of error to truth , darkness to light, evil to goodness, but rather of potence to act, seeds to fruits, type or symbol to things and reality in itself"[43].

C.I.S.R.S. besides promoting and supporting the concern of inter-religious dialogue through its journal and research based publications on dialogue [44], has also helped in developing and establishing the work of dialogue in the country. For example during December 1962, it organised a dialogue seminar on 'Sikhism and Christianity in the Panjab', which laid the future basis for Sikh- Christ' an. dialogue in the country. The report and presented papers in the seminar were published in Religion and Society [45]. About the general basis of this first Sikh-Christian meeting, the former Director of C.I.S.R.S. M.M.Thomas stated: "Sikh and Christian scholars are meeting together in this Conference for a conversation on the deepest things of religion, in which they are different. But we meet as men sharing a common humanity. There will no doubt be differences even in the way Sikhism and Christianity define this community of humanness. But I suppose we can all affirm two aspects of this community. First is that we are all faced with the challenge to seek, to know and to respond to ultimate meaning and destiny of our living. Second is that we have a common task of building a society and nation in which all men realize their dignity as human persons called to love and serve one another"[46].

Besides the above one of the earliest inter-religious dialogue conferences, C.I.S.R.S. continues to hold such inter-religious programmes till the present, both at the regional as well as national level.

The next example of an ecumenical institute involved in interfaith dialogue is from North India, namely the 'Christian Institute for Religious Studies' (C.I.R.S.), Batala, Panjab, (formerly known as Christian Institute for Sikh Studies). This institute was established in the late sixties. But it started functioning on more regular basis from 1972 onward and it had its major first inter-religious seminar from December 7-9, 1973 at Batala on the theme' Popular Religion in the Punjab To-day. 'The purpose of the seminar was to find out what is happening in the religious life of the Punjab at the present time.47 Participants included from Sikh, Hindu, Muslim, Jain and Christian backgrounds. The second major seminar, the Institute held on 'The Nature of Guruship' and the purpose of this was to arrive at a fuller and more comprehensive understanding of Guruship according to different religions and religious traditions [48]. The participants included Hindu, Sikh, Christian (both Roman Catholic and Protestant), Muslim, and popular Hindu and Muslim sects like Ahmadiyya Movement and Radhaswami Sat Sang. C.I.R.S. are continuing in promoting the concern of inter-religious dialogue in multi-religious basis and also brings out a monthly 'Bulletin' which carries out reports and articles on different aspects of multi-religious concerns including dialogue.

Besides C.I.S.R.S. and C.I.R.S. there are Protestant Theological Colleges and Seminaries which are not only teaching inter-religious dialogue as part of their comparative study programme, they also hold and take part in various seminars and consultations on 'dialogue'. Even the secular colleges like Madras Christian College some times have major seminars on inter-religious dialogue. This College had a major international seminar on 'Inter-religious Dialogue for National Integration and Human Solidarity' from January 27-31, 1986. The proceedings of this seminar were published, which has been referred in this paper.

3.2.2. Henry Martyn Institute of Islamic Studies

Reference has already been made in section 2.1. on 'History', how with the initiative of N.C.C.I., the present H.M.I. came into existence in 1930 with a specific aim to encourage study and research of Islam in the context of India. Concerning the over all work of H.M.I., particularly with regard to dialogue, the former Associate Director of the Institute in 1980 said: "During the last decade or two the word "Dialogue" has become widely used, and perhaps misused, to describe an activity which has become increasingly important in our pluralistic world. The concept is not a new one for the H.M.I. for the records from the very beginning speak of mutual relationships, both on a personal and an institutional level, which today would be called dialogue"[49].

It is true what Lindell has said above, because it was as early as 1947, when in the Bulletin of the Institute, John W. Sadiq made a 'Plea for a fresh approach to Muslim' and then in 1959 Ian H. Douglas directly introduced the concept of dialogue again through the Bulletin by saying: "Even if Christian-Muslim meeting on the world-wide level is a long way off, there is real hope of true dialogue here and there at the intellectual level. And the preparation of Christianity in study conferences under able leadership increases the possibilities"[50]. In 1967 'Huma', an Urdu journal of H.M.I. was also started from Lucknow with one of the main purposes "to create among Christians the taste for a serious study of Islam"[51].

Besides spreading the concern of 'dialogue', H.M.I. also was involved in the process of dialogue through seminars and consultations. For example in 1966 it had a three-day dialogue meeting jointly with the Indian Institute of Islamic Studies (founded during 1963 in New Delhi) on the theme "faith and works", which was attended by twenty Muslim and Christian scholars. Here in this meeting some of the Muslim participants made very positive comments and they advocated a better understanding between Muslim and Christians. As result of which

in the following years, number of meetings took place jointly with the Jamia Nizamiyyah in Hyderabad and the Indian Institute of Islamic Studies in New Delhi. In these dialogue meetings the topics dealt were: Religion in the Modern Age; Man, His Nature and Destiny; Salvation; God and Secularity, Social Justice; and Women in Great Religion [52]. During March 1968 another major Muslim-Christian Seminar was jointly organised by the Indian Institute of Islamic Studies and H.M.I. [53].

H. M. I. had its more recent major consultation on 'the Church and Islam in India', from November 24-26, 1990. In the preparatory document which was prepared during a two day consultation in the month of July 1986, it was expressed: "Henry Martyn Institute (H.M.I.) is an expression of the Church's ministry of reconciliation which comes to focus on the relationship between Christians and Muslims"[54]. During the consultation itself, the "Participants also felt that the Indian Church must be prepared to play a prophetic role in inter-faith relations and suggested that H.M.I. could provide leadership and direction in this area." The number of steps were recommended to carry on 'ministry of reconciliation' through inter-faith process [55].

4. Other Religions in Inter-religious Dialogue

Now where the question of other major Indian religions 'involvement is concerned, it is not going to be possible to make detailed investigation of their role, because of the scope and limitation of the length of this presentation. Here only in the next section 4.1 a few examples will be given of the direct efforts, which the followers of

Sikhism and Hinduism have made and then briefly the initiatives of Muslim are dealt with in section 4.2. But before that here it must be mentioned that most of the efforts and programmes, which have been considered in the introduction of section 3 and sub-sections 3.2. and 3.2.1. have mostly been multi-religious dialogue meetings, and the participation of Hindu, Sikh and some of the other various smaller religious sects have been very active. The same is true with the international and regional inter-religious programmes, which have been carried under the auspicies of World Council of Churches (W.C.C.). So here in the next two sections only the references have been made to those programmes, where initiatives have come directly from other religions.

4.1. Hindu and Sikh Initiatives

Where the Hindus are concerned, though they have taken part actively whenever they were invited by Christians or others for any inter-religious meetings or seminars, yet their own initiative has been minimum. But it is indeed encouraging to note when during 1994 for the first time in the history of inter -religious dialogue, the 'Indian Council of Philosophical Research' (I.C.P.R.), the country's highest institute of philosophy along with 'Satya Nilayan', the Jesuit Philosophical Research Institute have jointly sponsored a programme on Hindu-Christian dialogue. Fourteen Christian indologists and some Hindu scholars took part in this dialogue meeting and it is also for the first time when Hindu scholars accepted the Christian contribution to Indian philosophy and also agreed with the fact that Indian philosophy does not necessarily mean Hindu philosophy. R.Balasubramanian, Chairman of the I.C.P.R. said, 'This is the first time the I.C.P.R. is sponsoring such a programme as Hindu-Christian dialogue ... and it intends to continue such a dialogue from different points of view"[56].

In the recent years the response to the concern of inter-religious dialogue has come very much from the followers of Sikh religion. Two of the major Universities of Punjab have given a

lead in this area, namely Punjabi University, Patiala, and Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar. The Sikh professors and others from these Universities have actively responded to the invitations extended to them by various Christian institutions. In the case of the Punjabi University, it has a Department of Religious Study, where all religions are taught by professors belonging to different religions. It has organised lectures and seminars on different themes. For example in March 1985 it organised a three-day seminar on the theme 'Religious Pluralism and Coexistence.' About 27 scholars belonging to Hinduism, Christianity, Sikhs and Islam participated in this seminar and all through the seminar the need of religious coexistence was felt by everyone [57].

The Guru Nanak Dev University is having a department of Guru Nanak Studies, under which it has been organising inter-religious dialogue meetings and seminars. One of the earliest major seminars it had in March 1973 on the 'Sikh Concept of the Divine' but papers from Christians and Hindus were also invited, which took the form of comparative studies [58]. More recently, a major seminar was organised by Guru Nanak Dev University in March 1991 on the theme 'Co-Existence in. Pluralistic Society: Punjab Problems and Prospects'. Here again the participants were from Hindu, Christian, Muslim and Sikh backgrounds [59].

Besides the above two Punjab Universities, there are a number of research institutes namely Guru Nanak Foundation, New Delhi; Institute of Sikh Studies, Chandigarh; Gobind Sadan Institute for .Advanced Studies in Comparative Religion, New Delhi; and International Institute of Gurmat Studies, Ludhiana. These Institutes are regularly conducting inter-religious dialogues also on different themes. Then there are some official committees of Sikh temples like Delhi Gurdwara Management Committee, which also often organises interfaith meetings. For example the Delhi Committee had a 'National Seminar on Guru Nanak Dev and Composite Indian Culture' on November 10, 1991, to which Hindu, Christian and Muslim scholars were invited to make presentations on the main theme from their religious background perspectives.

In recent times (December 1992 onward) another national movement of inter-religious has been started namely the Dalit Solidarity Programme in India (D.S.P.). D.S.P. in every programme which it organises, brings together religious leaders and scholars to deal with the issue like 'liberation of the oppressed or Dalit'. Here in this programme participants are involved from Hindu, Sikh, Muslim, Christian and Buddhist backgrounds. D.S.P. is adding presently a new thrust in the whole area of inter-religious dialogue approach, which is by nature non-traditional [60].

4.2. Indian Muslim in Inter-Religious Dialogue

Already in Section 2.1 references have been made to the Muslim pioneers in the field of inter-religious dialogue, which included Muslim Mughul emperor Akbar, Abul Fadl, Sufi Prince Muhammad Dara Shikuh and nineteenth century liberal Muslim scholar Saiyed Ahmad Khan. To this list of names the more recent supporters of inter-religious dialogue from Muslim names can also be added: K.G.Saiyi (1904-71) and Abid Husayn (died 1978) of the Islam and the, Modern Age Society, and Nisar Ahmed Faruqi of the same Society, who is equally committed to cause of inter-religious dialogue. There are of course more Muslim scholars who support the need of inter-religious dialogue at the present time. To some of them reference will be made a little later.

Also already references have been made to the work of the Indian Institute of Islamic Studies (I.I.I.S) which was founded during 1963 in New Delhi and has been actively involved along

with H.M.I. in organising jointly the inter-religious dialogue seminars right from the years of its foundation. One of the most important seminars hosted by I.I.I.S was in October 1978 on the theme "Mosque and Church, Their contribution to inter-religious harmony and reconciliation." This seminar was jointly organised by I.I.I.S. with H.M.I. and the Dialogue Commission of the C.B.C.I. This seminar highlighted the new awareness of the community dimension of dialogue.

Two presentations by well known Muslim scholars brought out very important points from the Muslim perspectives. Syed Wahiduddin, former Head of the Department of Philosophy, Delhi University pointed out that the Holy Quran has laid down the basis of inter-religious dialogue. Ziaul Hsan Faruqi, the Principal of Jamia Milia Islamia, New Delhi, in his presentation "made a strong plea for the need for religious communities to open up to one another in dialogue and to thoroughly revise traditional attitudes and teachings" [61].

There are a number of other efforts at different levels, which either are led by Muslim scholars or through their participation. One such example is the 'Institute of Objective Studies: (I.O.S.) New Delhi, which deals with common issues through seminars and publications faced by the various religious groups especially by minority religions. One of the well-known publications on 'Minorities and the State at the Indian Law: Anthology' edited by Tahir Mahmood [62] was brought out by I.O.S. in 1991. The more recent seminar conducted by I.O.S.. was on July 17, 1994 on the theme 'Educational Rights of Minorities under the Indian Constitution'. The participants and contributors to these programmes of I.O.S. are always invited from different religious background.

Finally, two most recent works from Muslim sources need an attention, because these will state the present position of the Muslim in the field of inter-religious dialogue. These two works are: 'Indian Muslims - The need for a positive outlook' (19941) by Maulana Wahiduddin Khan [63] and 'Lifting the Veil-Communal Violence and Communal Harmony in Contemporary India' (1995) by Asghar Ali Engineer [64]. Both these works are having chapters on 'Hindu-Muslim Dialogue' and 'Inter-religious Dialogue and Communal Harmony' respectively, which are being referred to here.

One of the issues before Maulana Wahiduddin Khan in his work 'Indian Muslim - The Need for a Positive Outlook' is the question of harmony among the followers of different religions. While discussing this issue, of course he is having before him the current problem of India namely 'Communal Violence' based upon the understanding of different communities. According to him Hindus believe in plural concept of which Islam and Christianity do not uphold, but both the religions believe in other tenet, namely, respect for other religions. According to Maulana Wahiduddin Khan: "Just as religious co-existence is valued in Hinduism, so also it is valued in Christianity and Islam. If differences arise, they do so as a matter of rationale, and not of actual practice. That is, the goal of coexistence is achieved in Hinduism through corecognition, while in Christianity and Islam, it is achieved through mutual existence [65].

Maulana Walidduddin Khan while laying emphasis on the need of Hindu-Muslim dialogue says it is ultimately people who have to deal with one another. It is one religious community with another which has to deal finally in deciding any crucial issue. He takes the example of December 6, 1992 incident, when Hindu karsevaks (volunteers involved in religious cause) demolished the Babri Mosque, even though this was not the government's decision.

According to him, public is more powerful than the government. Therefore he says, Muslim community has to enter into dialogue with their counterpart namely Hindus on the question of Mosque, instead of government or the administration. According to him the solution to such problems lies not in Muslim-ruler meetings, but in Hindu-Muslim meetings. He says, 'holding of such a dialogue is in complete consonance with the Islamic Shariah (traditions)' and he further adds that the Peace Treaty of Hudaybiyyah in the history of Islam was the result of a successful dialogue of this kind. This treaty took place in A.D. 628 between Prophet Muhammad and non-Muslims at a place called Hudabiyyah, near Mecca [66].

Asghar Ali Engineer before dealing with the question of inter-religious dialogue, began his observations with the various religious and communal conflicts, which are going on in India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. According to him in Pakistan and Sri Lanka the basis of these conflicts is more e than religious. But in India certainly the conflict of Hindus and Muslims is both of communal as well as religious in. nature. He says this kind of conflict was not in the medieval period, because Muslim ruling classes used to share political power with others. At times conflict existed mostly at a theological level, because of Muslim ulama (priestly cum scholarly class). To support his points, Engineer quotes the good examples of emperor Akbar and Sufi Prince Dara Shikuh.

But then he refers to the serious problems which are going on between Hindus and Muslims in India today. Communal violence continues to reoccur. He estimated since 1947 till now more than 15,000 big and small riots have taken place. He has listed two main reasons for these: one: 'complete absence of inter-faith dialogue' and two: 'the exploitation of people's ignorance about each other's religion by the politicians'. Therefore, he says it is 'very necessary to promote inter-religious dialogue between the two principle communities.'

Engineer to support his views has given many quotes from the Holy Quran. According to him the Holy Quran stresses on the point that Prophet Muhammad has not come to preach a new truth, but he came to confirm the truth which already exists. He says also that "the Quran does not reject the religions which existed before Islam, but confirms their truth"[67]. Besides quoting a number of other verses from the Holy Quran, Engineer quotes a well known verse, which reads as: "Verily We have revealed to thee as We revealed to Noah and the prophets after him, and as We revealed to Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and the tribes, and Jesus, and Job and Jonah, Aaron and Solomon; and to David gave We Psalms" (4:163). He also gave the example of Sufi, who paid full respect to the Hindu religious traditions. According to Engineer the traditional Muslim theology is not suitable for the present situation. He says very clearly: "The traditional theology was partly, if not wholly, ' contextual, and needs to be seen in the new context in India. If this approach is adopted, ways will be found for harmonious co-existence with other religious communities, particularly the Hindus. The traditional ulama may not respond to the new situation easily. This task will have to be undertaken by the modem intellectual among the Muslims ... The challenge posed by Allah in the Quran - to live in peace and harmony in a pluralist context as it is not Allah's desire to create only one religious community (5:48) has - to be taken seriously by Indian Muslims and this cannot be done without rethinking traditional theology"[68].

5. Concluding Remarks

In a way the whole presentation was itself reflective in nature. Therefore in the concluding section' only brief, and a few comments are offered.

The first point, which becomes clear is that historically both the Muslim rulers (like Akbar) and the Muslim Sufi (like Dara Shikuh) have been the earliest pioneers in the inter-religious dialogue in India. Their genuine pursuit of the Truth laid the foundation of today's inter-religious dialogue.

The second point, which becomes clear is that where Christians, both Roman Catholic and various Protestant traditions are concerned, their search for alternative model of 'mission' (through various international and national conferences) and conflict which in this search arose between the two opposing groups of theologians (liberal and neo-Orthodox) gave birth not only to the present ecumenical movement, but it also became responsible for the present movement of inter-religious dialogue in the present form.

The third point, which becomes clear is that it seems the need of the inter-religious dialogue has been increased and it is clear from the increased response of the followers of the Sikh and Hindu religions during the years. The initiative of the Sikhs in this is indeed most positive as now they are not only having the status of participants, but also have become organizers.

The fourth point, which becomes clear is that all the living religious traditions contain itself the best of all others, no one religion can claim the monopoly of the Ultimate Truth. This was clear from the Christians who promoted the idea of 'Rethinking Christianity in India' during the thirties and what Asghar Ali Engineer has pleaded for the rethinking of Muslim 'traditional theology'. This challenge of rethinking of various theological expressions upheld by different religious traditions is a move toward, what Indian Roman Catholic theologians in their Association meetings came to a conclusion that the Christians today have to move from ecclesiocentrism as well as from Christocentrism toward theocentrism in order' to find a common theological platform in dialogue with adherents of other faiths'.

The fifth point, which becomes clear, particularly the position represented by two Muslim scholars namely Maulana Wahiduddin Khan and Asghar All Engineer that the current situation in India created by the on going communal and religious conflicts between different religious groups can be dealt only by adopting the inter-religious dialogue approach which it looks is an immediate need of the present time.

Finally, the sixth point, which becomes clear, is that inter-religious dialogue is an exercise through which the different partners get engaged in order to realize a wider community in which peace and justice possibly will be more fully realized. This exercise leads in turn into a dialogue between communities belonging to different religions and ideologies, in which issues of national and international concerns are dealt with.

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