

Tolerance, Intolerance and Inter-Religious Dialogue

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Asia has always been considered the cradle of world religions and rightly so. In this vast continent, where Christians, Muslims, Sikhs, Buddhists and Jains co-exist, people are aware of the existence of different religions in their own surroundings. In many countries this consciousness is bringing about positive changes in the attitude of the adherents of these religions. On the other hand, some countries—such as India—where people of different religions have lived side by side in peace over the centuries, this consciousness has brought about a negative change in them towards believers in religions different from their own. This has given birth to fundamentalist movements in many countries and in different religions. Some claim that these have political undercurrents, rather than genuine religious reasons.

The effects of this were witnessed in India in the last few months of 1990, when some 700 people lost their lives in communal and religious riots on the issue of a Muslim mosque and Hindu temple. This very issue as recently as in December of 1992 again swallowed the lives of more than a thousand people all over the country.

Along with this consciousness of the existence of other religions and the rise of fundamentalism, there is also a growing consciousness among some people, especially among many religious leaders and true seekers of God, of the need to bridge the gap that exists, in varying degrees, between different religions.

This consciousness has not grown out of nowhere. The efforts to understand, acknowledge and search for truth in other religions started a long time ago in many different parts of the world. De Nobili and John de Britto, Jesuit missionaries in India, pursued the elements of truth and revelation in other religions. Mahatma Gandhi, though more famous the

world over for his philosophy of non-violence, read the Bible and spoke about the elements of truth in other religions as well. The founder of the Sikh faith, Gurunanak, tried to find a mid-path to reconcile the conflict between Islam and Hinduism. Nabinder Nath Tagore, a mystic in his own right, had a universal outlook towards religion and addressed God in very much the same terms as any other mystic. Kabir Dase is considered by both Hindus and Muslims as a saint belonging to their own religions, and at his death, both wanted to cremate or bury him according to their own religious rites. This was because he had a vision about bringing different religious teachings under one umbrella. These are thinkers and people of centuries past; only their thoughts and writings are left with us.

In India, one often hears simple people saying that all religions teach the same basic moral teachings, that God is one and all have to reach Him in the end. People only take different paths to get there. The Catholic Church almost twenty-five years ago announced novel ideas through Vatican II, its historic council. It no longer spoke in harsh terms about pagans, or in a tone of self-complacency as if it alone had the monopoly to total truth about God. Vatican II documents in *Nostra Aetate* (1965) nos. 1 and 2 stated that in this age, with people drawing more closely together and the bonds of friendship between different peoples being strengthened, the Church examines with greater care her relation to non-Christian religions. Aware of her duty to foster unity and charity among individuals and among nations, the Church reflects on what people have in common and what tends to promote fellowship among them.

Nostra Aetate further states that the Catholic Church rejects nothing that is true and holy in these (other) religions. She has a high regard for the manner of life and conduct, the precepts and doctrines which, although different in many ways from her own teaching, nevertheless often reflect that truth which enlightens all people.

The Council brought this consciousness to many, and while some were struggling with these proclamations, it went a step ahead to instruct itself and its faithful in these words.

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 truth found among non-Christians, also their social life and culture.

Nostra Aetate (1965)

This consciousness has given birth to what is called after the function it serves, “inter-religious dialogue”. For some it has become an attractive new terminology to experiment with, but there have been many serious efforts to conduct, participate in and live inter-religious dialogue.

Although inter-religious dialogue is a reality of some sort, it is not a reality in the sense that a concrete mosque, church building or temple is. Hence one cannot easily perceive the progress it has made. Considering that it is more a mind-set than a material reality, and that it takes a long time to influence people's thinking, the post-conciliar era of 25 years is not a long time.

TOLERANCE AND ATTITUDE

Misunderstandings take place among people because of a lack of proper information, in this case on religions other than one's own. Some of these problems could be confronted and resolved if there would be a concerted effort towards dialogue among different religious groups. Any dialogue would presume some sort of mutual understanding, appreciation and some degree of tolerance. An important foundation of any inter-religious dialogue would be the pre-disposition of individuals. In this study we have identified this pre-disposition as the degree of religious tolerance.

Religious tolerance is considered as an expression of one's attitude towards other religions and to some specific religious situations. However, religious tolerance does not exist in a vacuum, but in definite concrete situations, and can vary according to the situation. In some circumstances like scripture reading, religious tolerance is high, whereas in some other areas this tolerance could be quite low. The researcher identified situations that would indicate the degree of religious tolerance among different religious groups.

This religious tolerance will be studied in view of inter-religious dialogue. Dialogue, in the strict sense of the word, is defined as: "Conversation between two or more people or an exchange of opinions, discussion or a political discussion between representatives of two nations or groups. (*Oxford English Dictionary*, 1986). Thus, dialogue by its very nature, involves communication between two individuals, between two groups or amongst many groups. Although it could take place in many contexts, such as political, social, educational and others, the discussion in this paper will be limited to communication enhancing and facilitating inter-religious dialogue. The problem under investigation is therefore "The role of communication in inter-religious dialogue specifically in bringing about attitude change". In other words, how can the various communication media help increase the degree of tolerance and diminish levels of intolerance among the four major religious groups of Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs and Christians in Indore, India?

In order to answer this, the study will undertake to find answers to the following sub-questions:

1. What is the degree of religious tolerance/intolerance among the four religious groups of Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs and Christians?

2. Which religious group is the most tolerant/intolerant with regard to the following aspects of religious/communal life?

a) Inter-religious marriages.

b) Inter-religious prayers and worship.

c) Reading and religious worship using scriptures of other religions.

d) Participating in the festivals of other religions.

e) Receiving of *prasad*,¹ Eucharist) in other religious worship.

As mentioned above, the problem under study is that of communication in the context of inter-religious dialogue and as relating to religious tolerance. Communication, although a relatively new discipline and area of research, is one area which hovers over all the aspects of human life, for without communication, nothing is possible. Thus along with psychologists and sociologists, communication researchers have also entered into the study of attitudes and attitude change. The study deals with attitudes, particularly factors that affect attitudes. The specific area of study, i.e. religious tolerance, is considered as an attitude, and is thus discussed.

The survey uses a questionnaire without an interview schedule. It was distributed only to literate people, i.e. those who could read and write. This left out the uneducated (i.e. illiterate). This is one major limitation of the study. The study relates to inter-religious dialogue as a function of communication. Therefore, other themes related to inter-religious dialogue, such as the theological aspect, comparisons of different religions, etc. were not included in the study. Another limitation of this study was the location of the research field. The questionnaire was administered in Indore, India, far away from Ateneo de Manila, Philippines where the researcher was pursuing his master's program in communication.

The social situation of Northern India was highly charged at the time of administering and retrieving the questionnaires and constituted a major limitation. It affected the number of retrieved questionnaires, which in some way distorted the results of the survey due to disproportionality.

FACTORS INFLUENCING ATTITUDE AND TOLERANCE

Influence of Family and Culture

Much study and research has been conducted by social scientists and anthropologists on the role of the family in influencing attitude change. Parental influence and early socialization experiences are more potent in accounting for variance in religiosity than any of the variables current in

the individual's life history,² and moral convictions and religious attitudes are formed more by the family than by any other institution, including the school.³

From our daily life experience, we know that children born in a particular family belonging to a particular religion, finally end up following the same religion as that of the parents. In this regard, they have practically no choice. Their religious affiliation begins right from birth. In the family, in the very first place children have no choice of their own to choose the religion of their liking. Would I not have been a Hindu if I had been born in my neighbour's house, or Muslim if born in another town? It is not in the hand of an individual to choose their religion. To elaborate further, it is from the family that children imbibe the religiosity of the family in themselves, in such a way that if the family is deeply religious, their attitudes are influenced by the family thus becoming more religious or vice-versa.

Bossard in *The Sociology of Child Development*⁴ studied some four hundred families and observed their intimate interdependence of religious behaviour and family structures. He concluded that "The religious actions, rites, prayers, celebration of holy days, etc, give cohesion to the family group and, in turn, ritual actions are given value of collective participation." He cites numerous accounts of adults who recalled the details of family rituals of their childhood. He confirms that identification acquired in childhood leaves its mark on the adult's personality and one's sentiment of religious affiliation remains marked by it.

The influence of parents does not operate in a vacuum; it is found within the framework of a larger primary milieu. This is in the customs, traditions and practices of an ethnic group or even a country. A country like India could claim to have many sub-cultures within the big Indian culture. Parents themselves are representatives of the cultural values which they transmit to their children.

At this point we may add that informal education, such as that obtained from the oral milieu (sayings, beliefs) and physical milieu (incidents) have bearing on attitude formation. The author, who grew up in India in a multi-religious milieu, remembers the many negative and positive influences he has had in terms of the formation of his attitudes, which in turn affect his attitude of tolerance and intolerance. Here are a few examples from his personal life which he believes have led him to form some prejudice against particular groups. He believes that other religious groups have heard these or similar sayings in their own milieu.

In Hindi, a Christian is known as *Eesai*. The butcher is known as *Kassai*. These two words are often spoken as a rhyme. What one hears people say

is that Christians are cruel butchers. The reason attributed to this saying is that, unlike the Hindus, Jains or the Buddhists, the Christians are non-vegetarians in their food habits. Christians are those who kill (butcher) living animals to fill their stomachs. When someone hears statements such as these, he forms an opinion, which if confirmed, turns into an attitude. If this is said of the Christians, there are other slogans for the minority Muslims too. The Muslims in Hindi are called *Muslimann*. The word for a "cheat" in Hindi is *Beimann*. Once again, the words rhyme, and when combined together mean Muslims are all cheats. A Sikh in Hindi is called *Sardaar*. The word to express, "be careful" in Hindi is *Khabardaar*. One can often hear people using phrases pointed at the Sikhs meaning, "Be careful of Sikhs." In India many jokes are made about *Sardaar* and anything foolish or out of the ordinary is attributed to them.

Expressions such as these are commonly heard and leave a lasting impression in the minds of people which in turn forms their attitudes.

Religion and its Influence on Attitudes

One of the most important factors that helps in formation of religious attitudes of people are the religions themselves.

From the point of view of experience, there are two distinct religious experiences to be found in different places and at different times in the history of religion. Berger⁵ defined this distinction thus;

In the first, the divine is encountered as a reality utterly transcendent with reference to the human, confronting the human from the outside; put differently, in this experience, the human and the divine are sharply polarized. In the second form of religious experience, the divine is discovered within the depths of human consciousness itself and with which, in the extreme case, it may be identified. It was also hypothesized that although both types may be found cross-culturally, they occur, as it were, in different frequency distribution. The first confrontational type is most characteristic of the monotheistic religions deriving from western Asia, epitomized in scenes of such power as that of Moses confronting the burning bush, Paul encountering the risen Christ on the way to Damascus, or Muhammad receiving the Koran on Mount Hira. The second, interior type is most characteristic of religious traditions deriving from the Indian subcontinent, epitomized once and for all by the Buddha experiencing enlightenment under the Bodhi tree, though adumbrated in every variety of mysticism, no matter where it might occur. Indeed, roughly speaking, the type coincides with the category of mysticism as the interior path of the divine or the ultimate reality.

The very nature of each religion gives a different outlook and view of reality, helping the followers of those religions to form attitudes that are in line with the perceptions of reality or the ultimate as seen in that religion. Hence the followers of religions which originated in India carry within them an inward (due to its interior experiential nature) looking attitude, as opposed to the outward looking attitude (also based on reason, etc.) of the religions that originated in the Middle East.

Other important factors that influence the formation of religious attitudes are the sets of basic teachings and tenets of each religion. Christianity, for example, like Islam, always has been considered, and is in fact, very dogmatic in its approach. These two religions place a great importance on their dogmas.

Some of the adherents of Islam have gone so far as to claim that all the religions on earth are Islam and every believer is a Muslim. This is maintained by many Muslims and mentioned by S. D. Islahi in *Islam at a Glance*⁶;

In view of the fact mentioned above, apparently there should not be any kind of discrimination concerning name and the interpretation among the divine religions. Every divine religion, whether it is guided (*hari'ah*) by the Quran or by the Torah, the religion of Adam or Noah, the guidance bestowed on Abraham or Jesus in the name of every religion should be Islam and its followers should be Muslims because by virtue of their origin and reality all these Divine codes (*shari'ah*) were Islam and their followers were Muslims.

The Catholic Church, prior to the Second Vatican council, had been holding similar views, and always claimed that it alone had the whole truth and that the fullness of revelation was given only to the Catholic church. It made a grave mistake of calling those who did not belong to its fold "pagans". It held the view of *Extra Ecclesia Nulla Salus*. Through the teachings of the church, her believers also imbibed this spirit which, for all practical purposes, is rigid and to some extent intolerant.

Peter Staples was quoted by Beltran in *The Christology of the Inarticulate*⁷ as saying that in his view religious practices emanate from what the sociologists refer to as popular religion. Thus, there is popular religion and official religion.

Popular religion consists of religious ideas and customs produced by commercial interest and accepted on the consumer goods market by a broad public. Popular or folk Catholicism includes elements sanctioned by church authorities, which are derived from and sanctioned by the community where these are believed and practiced as expressions of human needs and longings.⁸

Official religion, for example official Catholicism, is a set of beliefs, rituals and practices which are held approved, prescribed, required and maintained as normative by ecclesiastical authority.⁹ Religion as a whole comprises both official religion and popular religion, and to attempt to measure religious tolerance, elements from both official religion and popular religion are to be studied. Scriptures of each religion, the way God(s) is/are addressed, certain prayers and liturgies, are elements belonging to official religion. Marriage, festivals, etc. are connected with and derived from popular practice of religion. It is difficult in some situations to put a demarcation line between practices and beliefs of popular religion and official religion.

Beltran¹⁰ further observed that popular religion has implications for the way reality is perceived, constructed, and maintained by the masses. It is related to the totality of social relations because its rituals renew and validate fundamental convictions about how reality is constituted and what the human being's place is in the scheme of things.

Religion in its totality is both popular and official religion, including totality of social relations, such as marriage and festivals. Forms of prayers are found in the context of popular religion too, but are derived more from social religious tolerance. The researcher found it imperative to take into consideration some elements such as marriage festivals, forms of prayer, etc. from social realities of religious expression. Elements like scripture, the way one addresses one's God, liturgical celebration and some aspects of official prayer, function in the context of official religion.

Along with the dogmatism of some of the religions, their institutional character is another source of attitude formation. In this regard, the Catholic church again differs a great deal from the other religions. Hinduism is not an institutionalized religion, and allows a lot of freedom of religious practices to its adherents.

Though India does not really have a Christian culture, the believers of Christianity have somehow imbibed its traits rather well into their life stream.

Religious Teachings of Different Religions

Another factor that affects the formation of attitudes is the religious teachings of each religion. It is not possible to go into detail about the different teachings of all the four religions under study, but a quick glance might help put the matter in the right perspective.

The Hindu religion basically is neither dogmatic nor institutionalised, and that is probably its greatest strength. It was not founded by one

individual at a particular time in history but developed over several centuries. P. Swami in *The Spiritual Heritage of India* says:

Hinduism is indeed a complex religion. No founder's initiative, no dogma, no reform have restrictions on its domain; on the contrary, the contributions of the centuries have been superimposed without ever wearing out the previous layers of development.¹¹ One could say that Hinduism is evolving even now, as every now and then some new Gurus and *Bhagwan* (code) surface on the Indian scene professing new beliefs and philosophies. The interesting thing is that the Hindu religion can absorb all these, considering them another branch of Hinduism, or another aspect of the Almighty which an individual has discovered.

Another important Hindu philosophy is that of *Neti-Neti* meaning "not this, not this". While describing the qualities of God, the Hindu hastens to add immediately "No! no! He is more than that". This is found in the *Brhadaranyaka Upanishad* which has made famous the doctrine of *Neti-Neti*, the mystical doctrine of the indescribability of the Absolute.

The Hindu religion, and some do not call it a religion at all, claims to have thousands of deities, although, since people are uneducated and poor, they do not know about the existence of all these. "Of all India's thousands of deities, only a few are known throughout the country. The most famous are Brahma, the Creator, Vishnu, the Preserver, and Shiva, the Destroyer".¹² Therefore it is not surprising that a Hindu might worship a single god or many gods, or may even seek release from this world through meditation. "Hinduism, therefore, as a religion is very tolerant. It is not what a man believes that makes him a Hindu. If he is born in a caste, he is a Hindu whatever he believes".¹³

For Sikhs *Nam-Jap* means reciting the name of God repeatedly, with different qualities of God. "The concept of the name of God is important in Sikhism. Sikhs are encouraged to meditate on the name of God, which is regarded as a revelation of the being of God."¹⁴ *Prasad* which is common to all, according to the Sikhs is "the sign of benevolence of God. Their scripture or the *Guru Granth Sahib* is very important." Supreme authority resides in their holy scripture *Granth*, the reading of which is their main form of worship.¹⁵

The Muslims regard the name of Allah as most sacred and since Islam is a staunchly monotheistic religion, they address Him always by this single name of Allah. "Allah-God is creator and supreme ruler of the Universe, known by men only in so far as He chooses to reveal Himself. The firm monotheism of Muhammad was a vital part of his message to the Arabia of his time, and the unity of God remains a major tenet of Islamic belief."¹⁶

One of the earliest public statements about Muhammad's view of Allah is found in Sura 112 of the *Holy Quran*: "He is Allah, the One, Allah the eternally besought of all; He begotteth not nor was begotten. And there is none comparable to Him." "Allah, the One, is the Allah of Judaism and Christianity, and Allah the eternally besought of all." ¹⁷

In general Christianity is one of the most organized religions with well formulated dogmas and Canon, but it also puts great emphasis on the faith of an individual. "Christianity is a system of faith, of hope, of love, a pattern of belief (and thought), a community of worship (and culture) and a way of life (society)." ¹⁸

The Catholics are even more organized than the Protestants in the sense that the supreme Pontiff, the Pope, is the head of the Catholic Church and of the hierarchy. Every member of the Catholic community is directly or indirectly connected through the parish, the parish priest, the bishop and the diocese to the ultimate Head, the Pope. It is all one whole Body, and it is always compared to the Body of Christ, with its different parts.

RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE AND ATTITUDES

Religion is something that leads people to God, exhorts its followers to live good moral lives and calls people of God to be of one mind and heart; but the present state of affairs shows an inconsistency between preached and lived religion, its tenets and practices, and its doctrine and behavior. This causes an immense amount of dissonance, this time from the angle of religious beliefs. Religion here, instead of achieving its positive function of mutual love, understanding among peoples, unity, purity, etc. has in the end made them less tolerant. There is clearly an inconsistency. Tolerance goes hand in hand with intolerance.

Perception and interpretation presuppose that different people will perceive the same truth differently and consequently discover many patterns and layers of meaning in a message or situation according to the attitudes one has formed towards what is being perceived. These attitudes are then expressed in behaviour where one chooses to act (tolerate), or better still, express an attitude of tolerance in that situation, according to the layer of meaning that has been perceived. People have attitudes because:

- a) attitudes help them to understand the world around them by organizing and simplifying a very complex input from their environment.
- b) attitudes protect their self-esteem by making it possible for them to avoid unpleasant truths about themselves.
- c) attitudes allow them to express their fundamental values.

In order to suggest concrete steps in the direction of change of attitude towards other religions, it is necessary to measure the actual tolerance of people. Since tolerance is an abstract thing, one has to conceptualize some real situations where it would be possible to measure the degree of tolerance.

Measurement of Tolerance

The main thrust of the research was to measure the religious tolerance of four different religious groups whereby religious tolerance is considered as an expression of one's attitude towards other religions and to some specific religious situations. The study uses a one-time survey¹⁹ aimed at analyzing the opinions and beliefs of a randomly selected group of people from the following religions: Hinduism, Islam, Sikhism and Christianity with regards to the inter-religious situation of marriage, prayer, use of scripture, truth in scripture, religious festivals, exchange of the name of God/s, and multi-religious participation.

SUMMARY OF ATTITUDES

Situation	Most Tolerant \longrightarrow Least Tolerant			
1. Prayer	Hindus	Christians	Sikhs	Muslims
2. God/s Name	Hindus	Sikhs	Christians	Muslims
3. Place of Prayer	Hindus	Christians	Muslims	Sikhs
4. Difference in Prayer	Sikhs	Hindus	Christians	Muslims
5. Truth in Scripture	Sikhs	Hindus	Muslims	Christians
6. Claim about Truth	Sikhs	Hindus	Christians	Muslims
7. Use of Scriptures	Hindus	Muslims	Christians	Sikhs
8. Religious Festival	Sikhs	Muslims	Christians	Hindus
9. Participation in Festival	Hindus	Sikhs	Muslims	Christians
10. Multi-Religious Worship	Muslims	Hindus	Christians	Sikhs
11. Sharing of <i>Prasad</i>	Hindus	Sikhs	Muslims	Christians
12. Marriage	Sikhs	Hindus/Christians		Muslims

Table 1.

The Results above show that the Hindus seem to be the most tolerant people and Muslims the least. Among the factors that influence the attitudes of tolerance/intolerance, the religious teachings of different religions play an important role.

Hindus appear to be more tolerant basically because of the structure of Hinduism, which is not institutionalized. Neither is it very dogmatic, like Islam or Christianity. History proves that Hinduism has always been open

and ready to absorb any new belief and to let that belief merge as a part of Hinduism. Even today people are allowed to follow their own *Ishta* (god). This gives them greater facility to express their faith in different forms and ways. This applies to their forms of prayer, place of prayer, their attitudes towards exchanging the name of God/s, the use of others' scriptures, participation in religious festivals and even to sharing of *Prasad*. It is true that the understanding of Hindus or Sikhs about *Prasad* is not the same as the understanding and teachings of the Catholics about *param-prasad* (The Eucharist).

It is not easy to pinpoint the reason why the Hindus, due to their religious teachings, are more tolerant as compared to the members of other religions. Hindu teaching are spread in many scriptures, over the whole length and breadth of the Indian subcontinent. Hindu beliefs are diverse and vast. Most adherents of the religion do not know exactly what they believe, and are therefore not firmly entrenched in a particular set of teachings.

The reason why Sikhs appear to be more tolerant than the Christians and the Muslims is because the Sikh religion more or less originated from Hindu beliefs. One of their most important Gurus, Guru Nanak, opposed many of the rituals existent in Hinduism at that time.

It is interesting to note that even though for the Sikhs supreme authority resides in their scriptures, Guru Granth Sahib, they are still tolerant enough to see that other scriptures may contain truth and authority, as does their own scripture.

The results of the survey as indicated in **Table 1** provide a summary of the important findings of the study. This table points out that the Hindus, who comprise 70% of the Indian population, show a greater degree of tolerance and positive attitudes in six of the twelve situations studied.

These six situations are the following: inter-religious prayer, exchanging the name of God/s with the name of God/s of other religions in such a prayer session, not being particular about the place of prayer—meaning that they could feel comfortable to use any place of prayer other than their own. The Hindus would be ready to use the scriptures of other religions for their own personal spiritual growth and they have participated in the religious festivals of other religions. In the situation of a multi-religious liturgical service, they would feel comfortable to share *prasad* with others.

Thus, in the over-all picture in terms of who are most tolerant, the study shows that Hindus could be considered the most tolerant. This is also the general understanding and claim of many Hindus in India. This may be attributed to the fact that Hinduism and its adherents have been tolerant of

other religions. Thus many other religions could take their roots in India.

The second most tolerant religious group is that of the Sikhs. Out of the twelve situations studied, they show a high degree of tolerance in five situations. When respondents were asked if they perceived any difference in their own prayers and the prayers of other religions, it was the Sikhs who showed the most tolerance, saying that they did not see any difference. They also perceived a lot of truth in scriptures other than their own. While the Hindus have shown greater tolerance in having participated in the festivals of other religions, it was the Sikhs who said that they would participate with equal enthusiasm in the celebration of other religious festivals as they would in their own. The Sikhs also showed greatest tolerance towards inter-religious marriages. As shown in **Table 1** the third ranking tolerant group was that of the Muslims. However, they appeared to be most tolerant in only one situation, in multi-religious worship.

The Table shows the tendency of both the Christians and the Muslims to be on the less tolerant side. Coming back to the problem of the study, whether it is possible to predict a change in the attitude of people based on the theories of attitude change and persuasion, the recommendations will consider some ways and means communication media can take in this regard.

One of the significant findings of this study is the at least in Indore (where there were and often still are communal riots), by and large a good percentage of people show a lot of tolerance in different religious and social situations. The percentage might differ according to the religious group, but basically there is tolerance. Since the study indicates this, it is the feeling of the researcher that communal riots and tensions are not solely because people are less tolerant of other religions, but because some other elements are at work, e.g. vote-hungry politicians. There could be other studies and research done on this topic to find out what actually affects these religious-related conflicts and violence.

At the end of this study, it appears that added to the political reason behind these conflicts, the newly born religious fanaticism is another important factor.

The study also showed that on two accounts, that of exchanging the name of one's own God/s with the name of other God/s during inter-religious prayer, and the use of scriptures of other religions during liturgical and official prayer sessions, the respondents did not show as much openness as on some other accounts, like inter-religious marriage, prayer, changing place of prayer or even attending religious festivals. Thus, those involved in

efforts of inter-religious understanding and dialogue should be more sensitive to these two situations and issues mentioned above. They should not try to push too hard to bring about changes in these attitudes with regard to God/s name and use of scriptures. These should be tried only after some good progress has been made on other fronts.

In the theoretical and conceptual framework of this study, some of the factors that affect the formation of attitudes were indicted. Among the most important are the family and the school (or the peer-group). The influence of school and family goes side by side. Thus, during children's formative years, efforts should be concentrated in the family and the school, to inculcate in them the value of religious tolerance.

The study also showed that those who had friends outside of their own religions appeared more tolerant in certain situations as compared to those who had no friends. This is another area to be looked into, especially by the media. Radio and television could be used to disseminate more information on other religions and their members and programmes related to friendship with people of other religions could be promoted. There could also be programmes showing the opposite trend—on the enmities and harm caused by communal riots erupting from religious tensions and disharmony.

Inter-religious dialogue is the cry of the hour in India. It can lead to harmony and peace. Media can perform great feats in this area, though, so far, it has been rather indifferent and inactive on this matter.

I conclude with reference to a comment made by J. H. Bransford as long ago as 1929²⁰ to the effect that man seems open-minded to himself, prizes this distinction, and gladly acknowledges it in others, if they will but patiently listen to an exposition of his views and grant him truth. Those who agree with him are reasonable; those who do not are evidently inadequately informed and indifferent or opposed to the light. No one will confess that he is unwilling to learn more than he already knows, or that he would refuse to modify his opinions were good reasons advanced for changing them. Men all flatter themselves that they are willing to be "shown", and that, when shown, they will welcome new truth.

Bransford contends that these preliminary observations are not meant to be cynical but scientific. They are statements of substantial psychological and emotional facts which are constantly neglected in most discussions of tolerance and intolerance. Nothing is achieved by denunciation and name-calling, because no one is a bigot or fanatic to himself. Man is a reasonable fairminded creature, knowing enough and brave enough to fight for right and defend himself and society at large against pernicious error. No progress will be made in encouraging novel and critical thinking by attacks

and defences. For that is not the way fair-mindedness is produced. Its genesis is hidden and accordingly the methods for its successful transplantation or dissemination are as yet obscure and demand a far more careful study than they have so far received if we are to make headway against what we loosely call intolerance.

NOTES:

1. *Prasad* is a Hindi word which does not have a proper equivalent in English, but comes close in meaning to something sweet (even coconut) which, after a religious ceremony, is distributed in a small quantity to all the participants. The Muslims have an equivalent which they call *Nivaz*. The Catholics in India use the word prefixed by *Param* (holy) in the term *Param-Prasad* to mean the Eucharist. The Eucharist of the Catholics is perceived by the non-Christians as something that should not be exclusive only to the Catholics, but can also be shared by the others who are present at a Eucharistic celebration.
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