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Conflict, Dialogue and Human Decency



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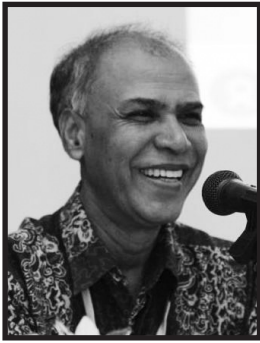
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Editorial

Mohammad Abdus Sabur

Conflict, Dialogue and Human Decency



Beatrice Popescu, the founding editor of Europe's Journal of Psychology once asked eminent professor Lou Marinoff, if he ever had been tempted to switch from academia to the corporate world in an engaged and engaging manner? Professor Lou Marinoff replied by say-

ing that the most rewarding aspect of academic life is its comparatively generous allotment of time for reflective and creative pursuits.

In this world, a majority of people are not directly engaged in the academic field but it does not mean that being in another occupation, one cannot be reflective and concerned about society and carry out social responsibilities. There are philanthropists as well as countless social activists and peace workers engaged but it will be enriching to have time for personal and collective study and critical reflections.

Philosophy as well as religion inspire us to question, seek the truth, and teach us ethics and values to differentiate between right and wrong. In the absence of such wisdom it is hard to discern and to be an advocate for justice. The clash between right and wrong is obvious in human society and that leads to conflict.

Some social scientists suggest that conflict is inevitable in society but conflict needs to be creatively transformed so that one party in conflict does not lose but wins together for the greater cause. Towards this process of transformation, dialogue is a must. To make dialogue meaningful, there is a need to create a congenial environment. Parties in conflict come to dialogue not so spontaneously. The first convincing factor is the self-realization that no one is a clear winner in the battle field. Secondly, there

is pressure from the international community. Such dialogue is very often facilitated by mediators. The first step is to develop mutual trust in order to seek truth together. To right the wrongs means taking responsibility to continue the process. There will be ups and down on the way.

Effective dialogue takes place when people involved in two or multiple conflicting parties adhere to the principle of human decency which refers to the quality of the human person to treat and respect others as equals without any discrimination. If we practiced these principles, in many ways conflict could be prevented. According to Professor Lou Marinoff only those whose inner conflicts are resolved, can be at peace with themselves, and therefore with the world.

In this issue of AMANA, Rose Gordon focuses on self and society, personal perceptions ought to be submitted for wider scrutiny and enriched with diverse experiences in order to be more relevant in seeking peace.

Ekraj Sabur highlights the deconstruction of the state ideology of forced assimilation of ethnic and religious minorities. He emphasizes natural nurturing of diversity and living in harmony.

Dr. Shabir Choudhry is meticulously critical of the false premises and promises of the liberation struggle for Kashmiri people. He personally sees the future in united Jammu and Kashmir in fulfilling their cherished dreams and aspirations. R J Barrete on the other hand raises both the possibilities and the vulnerabilities of the recently-concluded Framework of Agreement between the government of the Philippines and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front.

Mariya Salim, in her article underlines the promises of Islam for equality and dignity for all and depicts the real world where low-caste Muslim women live. Last but not least, Waris Mazhari in his article reaffirms that Quran calls for religious tolerance as an important principle in Islam. Hope these articles will generate further debate and critical awareness as well as individual and collective actions.

Mohammad Abdus Sabur is Secretary General of the Asian Muslim Action Network and Asian Resource Foundation, Thailand

Opening the Space for Dialogue and Transformation

Rose Gordon



While I tend to avoid conflict I know its a part of life and that addressing conflict can “polish” us, if we engage in it with respect and care, transforming us from rough gems into jewels.

Conflict is a red flag, calling for our attention, informing us that a situation exists that we don’t find beneficial. But the real reasons for the conflict might be different than we think. Why? Because conflict is often tangled up with misunderstanding. Those misunderstandings can create a cloud of emotional intensity that blocks our clear vision of the problem and prevents resolution or transformation from occurring.

However, if we are willing to explore the reasons for the disagreement, the conflict can become an opportunity to understand ourselves better and understand others better. When this happens and everyone is given an opportunity to identify what needs to change to resolve the conflict, the outcome can be mutually beneficial.

What does decency mean in the context of dialogue? Decency is defined in the dictionary as “behavior that conforms to accepted standards of morality or respectability. “It is also described as “qualities of honesty, good manners, and respect for other people“

But moral standards are usually left behind during violent conflict and respectability often gets tangled up in a person’s idea of his reputation or her identity as being “the good or righteous or misunderstood party” in the conflict. When we are busy defending our reputation or identity, we can’t truly listen. In the presence of defensiveness conflict transformation can come to a halt.

Can we lessen our inclination to defend our position so that transformation can occur? Can we create a space that reduces the need for defensiveness and increases the possibility for transformation and mutually beneficial outcomes?

Yes. First, as individuals, we need to be willing to entertain the idea that being part of a dialogue matters that talking with one another matters and that there is the possibility for a mutually beneficial change, a change that will be “a tide that lifts all boats.”

Secondly, we must remember that conflict arises when we feel harmed. The perception of harm is undeniably real to the one who feels it. As individuals, ethnic groups, communities or even nations, we might have been prevented from achieving our goals, deprived of dignity or deprived of basic well-being. We might have been robbed of natural resources, ignored, misused, mistreated or disrespected as being “less than” the other.

Any attempt to de-legitimize the experiences and reasons behind each party’s engagement in the conflict is a form of violence and will trigger more defensiveness and resistance. Until the reasons for being in conflict and the feelings that inform those reasons are heard, conflict cannot be transformed.

Dialogue is defined as “taking part in a conversation or discussion to resolve a problem. “ But, to me, it’s important to recognize that resolving a problem is not the starting point of a conversation, but the end point of our efforts.

So, what is the starting point and what does it take to create a space, an environment that fosters true dialogue and the resolution of conflict?

The starting point is a willingness to enter into a conversation that offers an opportunity to better understand one another, to more fully recognize our

shared humanity and to address everyone's concerns as respectfully and fully as possible.

Not only must we be decent, we must be honest. Not only honest, but receptive. Not only receptive, but willing to take action. That takes commitment and commitment takes effort.

Conflict transformation takes time and needs space. It's not simply choosing the "right location" though that's a factor. More than anything, dialogue, whether or not it involves conflict, needs space.

Years ago I facilitated a daily morning Council circle at the Zen Peacemakers Interfaith Gathering at Auschwitz concentration camp in Poland. The purpose of the Circle was to share our experiences and support each as we ate and slept and gathered in prayer at a place where terrible suffering had happened.

The place I was given for the Circle was a narrow hallway with bad lighting and an ugly carpet. It was not my idea of an ideal place. But I quickly discovered that the location was not what mattered. We transformed that place into a safe and nurturing space by how we listened to each other and by the unrehearsed nature of our speech. What mattered there was the relationship we created by the quality of our interactions.

I've carried that lesson into my work with women in prison and women in jail; with juveniles in trouble with the law and their victims. I've carried it into my work with people who are dying and their families and it hasn't stopped there.

Space for transformation is created by how we listen and speak to each other. It's created in the pauses we take in speaking, in the silence that we allow to blossom between us. It's created when no one feels they're being forced to arrive at a decision or consensus prematurely, that their comments are being brushed away, or that they are being labeled, or pre-judged. It's created when each person knows their participation carries equal "weight" because they're not interrupted and because they can feel and see that others are listening.

We can feel that kind of space. It's those moments when we sense that the room has not only gotten

larger; but that there's more room to breathe. In a way the space has gotten larger, and there is more "air" because the tension between people that makes the room feel tight and confining dissipates as respectful speaking and listening expands.

In the presence of deep listening and new understanding of the pain and suffering behind the conflict, we hear a group of wisdom arise - and it can become very clear where the change needs to happen.

Dialogue takes time. The deeper, sometimes "veiled or hidden" reasons for the conflict need to be explored, the cobwebs of misunderstanding need to be cleared away by new understandings. And this happens at the same time that the feelings of being harmed are neither denied nor brushed away. Our histories are a lineage of narratives that need to be heard so the harm can be teased apart from all the assumptions that have become entangled with it.

Conversation is an exchange, not a debate. It's not about convincing others of the righteousness of our position, but listening so that we understand their position and speaking in a way that communicates our position as clearly as possible. This is decency, or respect, in action.

True dialogue happens among people who consider themselves "equals", each deserving of respect. But a dialogue might begin simply with a wish to stop the conflict because the cost of conflict is a price too high to pay.

Always, we begin where we can, knowing that transformation is possible.

Our constant challenge is to find ways to recognize misguided assumptions and recognize when our point of view has been heard. Our challenge is to value each step forward, each truth revealed, each moment of respect demonstrated in the process. Dialogue challenges us to allow our own "story" to change, and listen in a spacious, non-fearful way; recognizing that we don't need to give up our legitimate grievances or diminish the grievances and suffering of others.

Most of all, perhaps, we need to recognize and act when those precious moments arise for collaborating on solutions that can result in a just peace; no mat-

ter how surprising and unexpected the solution might look. At those moments we must be willing to drop the old story and embrace the new story we are creating together; a story born of conflict, transformed for mutual benefit.

Rose Gordon is Coordinator and facilitator of Restorative Justice (RJ), for juveniles in New Mexico, USA, since 2004, she works with youth offenders and their victims and has involved over 300 community members in the RJ Circles. 94% of referred youth have not repeated their offenses. Rose also designs and facilitates RJ trainings for community members, including youth leaders. Rose incorporates Resiliency-Based approaches, Deep Listening, Solution-Focused Therapy, Motivational Interviewing, Crisis Intervention and other modalities into her work. Trained by nationally recognized pioneers in Council Process and Restorative Justice, Rose was the Co-Director of the Upaya Prison Project, bringing Council process & stress reduction meditation to women in the Santa Fe jail. She was a Council facilitator during the Zen Peacemakers Interfaith Bearing Witness Retreat at Auschwitz, Poland in 1999 and served as Co-facilitator of Connection Point Dialogues between Muslim and Western women. The 2014 IIPS 3 week Peace Studies and Conflict Transformation course was her first engagement as a Resource person with AMAN/ARF and IIPS



A dialogue with Samaki Women Community during Women in Armed Conict Workshop
at Pattani, Southern Thailand, 2012

Overcoming Hidden Religious Prejudices and Fostering Interfaith Cooperation through Dialogue

Ekraj Sabur

Why Interfaith Dialogue and Collaboration?



The world has become more connected via globalization particularly, advanced technology and social media. This nonetheless serves as double-edged sword which can potentially lead to either understanding, thus unity and coop-

eration or hatred and prejudices, hence consequential polarization and disintegration of the community. Religion has become more vital and influential in the lives of people and society both nationally and globally now, than ever before. Today, state and non-state actors are realizing the destructive consequences of ignorance of the importance of religions and faiths. The suppression, restriction and discrimination on the basis of religion and belief are now yielding the bitter fruits witnessed by people across the globe such as Islamophobia and war on terror, deadly Shia-Sunni conflicts in Syria, Genocide of Rohingya and violence against muslim Burma, Muslim and Christian communal conflicts in Ambon, Maluku and West Papua of Indonesia, the world-protracted conflict of Palestine and Israel, Christian and Muslim clashes in Central Africa, Hindu-Muslim communal violence in India and polarized Buddhist and Muslim communities in Southern Thailand. However such violent conflicts are not the result of religiously inspired root causes. The deep analysis of these conflicts enables an understanding of the common cause which is politicization of faiths driven by socio-economic and political factors. Failure to discern such complexity results in people falling prey to perpetual structural and cultural violence which further imprison them in the vicious circle of victimhood and vengeance. Religious divides and polarization paralyze and deprive local, national and global communities of opportunities to achieve development, prosperity and peace. These

challenges can be overcome only through dialogue, constructive engagement and cooperation among disciples and people of faiths. In examining the profound teachings of religions and faiths, the common messages of peace and justice are found, which serves as solid social capital and a vital resource for interfaith cooperation.

Asian Reality at a Glance

As articulated above, the religious divide is a challenge faced by several societies, if not every country across the world. The degree of manifestation varies from latent to overt. Within Asia, Indonesia's principle of Pancasila ensures a certain degree of harmony despite some challenges of discrimination against religious minorities and religious violence. Brunei has less discussion and discourse about issues around interfaith and interethnic relations while Malaysia has a clear state policy which favors Bhumiputra or Muslims and Malay ethnics. Despite Chinese and Indian political parties, the feelings of non-Bhumiputra remain inferior.

Thailand portrays itself as a tolerant and inclusive nation but territorial conflict understood by many as a result of a Buddhist and Muslim religious divide is a challenge. The assimilation policy intertwined with historical bitterness made Muslims of Malay ethnic origin in the Southern frontier provinces of Thailand feel excluded and not at home. Bhutan is known as a peaceful and harmonious country whose emphasis is placed on inner peace manifested by its gross national happiness policy. It has lost credibility upon the forced evictions and maltreatment of hundred thousands of people of Nepali origin. Buddhists of the Chittagong Hill Tracts in Bangladesh had fought for independence alongside with Bengali Muslims for liberation and independence but their plight, identities and space are not recognized in the Constitution.

It is a common phenomenon that the majority have failed to embrace the minority which further sharp-

ens the latter's ethno-religious identities to unify and assert their rights to gain recognition. There is no country in world that has perfect governance which could attain ideal inter-religious and interethnic equity and harmony. There are however, countries that are less sectarian and less extremist that attempt to be tolerant and inclusive. Experiences from countries that have made progress in nurturing tolerance and harmony can be learnt and inspire the key stakeholders to continue their struggles despite challenges.

Challenges and Opportunities

Natural or Nurturing?

There are several challenges to address and overcome the religious divide and achieve a culture of tolerance and governance for peaceful coexistence. Despite the fact that every religion shares a common message of peace, many tend to ignore this fact due to prejudices instilled in them from childhood and reinforced by media which shapes people mindset. There is also lack of education which promotes genuine understanding of world religions and faiths. Religious leaders have failed to bring positive elements of other faiths in their sermons. The education system remains shallow and obsolete to catch up with the polarization forces. The isolation, segregation and lack of interaction among people of different faiths further reinforce the image of the enemy and often with exaggeration. The prejudice becomes hidden, which individuals find it difficult to discover. Such religious prejudices are, therefore, nurturing and not natural which can be corrected. Hence, the barrier to interfaith harmony starts from teaching and preaching.

The challenge is how to introduce world religions, their message of peace and skills to deal with diversity and differences, to children and the public with an innovative approach to enhance their ability to undergo spiritual and personal transformation which is a pre-requisite to dialogue. For that, critical self assessment of one's spiritual path to discover hidden prejudices and strengths is needed. Innovative religious teaching should nurture humanity to make each individual become human. Human decency as a result of spiritual growth would enable individuals and groups to embrace dialogue, recognize hidden prejudices and re-learn positive elements of one

another's religions. The ultimate goal of religious education is to enable learners to achieve inner peace which is the pre-requisite to global peace. The process needs to start from childhood. The environment where children of diverse backgrounds can grow and experience collective sharing and caring is an integral part of the entire education system.

One of the outmost important elements in education is the development of educators as an effective and ethical human resource in the field. As the most effective teaching method is to deliver values through actions while the prejudices and biased attitude can always influence actions which render verbal teachings meaningless, religious teachers and educators need to be empowered with adequate understanding and ensured of their intrapersonal transformation.

Religious leaders and clergies can serve as the interfaith educator and must be given the opportunity to build their capacity in this aspect. Apart from schools and universities, sacred spaces or religious places should be the centre of interfaith education and dialogue with a welcoming atmosphere to people of all faiths.

Going beyond the Boundary

The concept of service is inherent in every faith tradition. Faith-based organizations have evolved from this concept but their services remain confined to their respective religious community. There are several inspiring examples such as churches in the West who raise fund to support development initiatives, disaster relief and even human rights and advocacy work throughout the world. They are in support of the anti-apartheid movement and promote Palestinian self determination. A similar, but still limited phenomena can also be observed in Asia. The Asian Interfaith Networks on HIV/AIDS (AINA) unites major faith communities in Asia to work together towards a common mission of combating HIV/AIDS. The challenge is how to encourage more faith-based organizations in Asia to uphold the principle non-sectarianism and non-extremism and open the windows to serve and extend support beyond their own faith community. There is also a need to foster interfaith cooperation among different faith communities which would not only contribute towards the greater good of the society but also build a united community among people of different faiths.

Religious Secular Dichotomy

There is a dichotomy and dilemma between religion-determined governance and separation of religion from state affairs or secularism. The latter form of governance implies that the state can run its own affairs without adhering to the principles and ethics of religions characterized by equity, justice and honesty. There is a fear that marginalization of religion in the governance system would lead to the erosion of morality and thus, ill governance. However, India is considered to be a secular state where religion has no role and the country is run based on modern democratic principles and Constitution. Communal conflicts and politicization of religion to divide the populace for political gain are rampant. On the other hand, when religion becomes part of state, it gets politicized and becomes the instrument of the dominant majority to protect their interest, often at the expense of the minority's miseries. The declaration of state religion itself has often made minorities feel excluded and marginalized. If religious principles are good governance, justice and equity, the country should not be deprived of such principles reflected in state affairs from priority-setting, to service delivery, policy-making and implementation. The challenge is how to unify the liberal aspects of different faiths amidst divided and polarized society and integrate into the governance system particularly education to shape relationship among the diverse members of society.

Spy and Traitor

The religious hatred and prejudices among polarized faith communities are difficult to overcome. To address interfaith conflicts, there is a need to begin with intra faith dialogue which helps conflicting parties realize the diversity within their own community. This would subsequently lead to realization that differences and diversity are not abnormal but natural. However, the complexity of intrafaith conflict is often ignored and underestimated. In fact, conflicts at intra faith level can be more destructive, deadly and difficult to overcome. This is because the disciples tend to monopolize their version of understanding and interpretation of text and are ready to sacrifice their lives to protect their sacred beliefs which are immutable and unchallengeable. The difference in belief within a faith community can therefore be seen as apostasy. In the face of a deeply divided society, one of the biggest chal-

lenges is effort foster understanding within and between faiths, how to move beyond one own faith boundary and community to bridge the gap by communicating with a socially- constructed enemy without being viewed as a spy or traitor?

Interfaith Cooperation through Dialogue

What is Dialogue?

Dialogue is a recognized powerful and effective tool to foster understanding, cooperation and harmony among people of diverse interests and backgrounds. It is not a new innovation but can be traced back to the early period of human civilization. Women and men have always tried to understand, acquire and share knowledge from each other both in times of war and peace. The concept of dialogue itself can also be found in faith and prophetic traditions. It can be said that dialogue is the means to make peace prescribed in all religions.

Dialogue is neither a mere interaction nor debate but a process which facilitates honest expression and questioning of one's own understanding of faiths. Deep listening from heart and mind is a key skill required to develop empathy which goes beyond understanding. It does not aim at conversion but a process of collective spiritual growth through mutual learning which enables participants to discover hidden prejudices and develop skills and sensitivity to deal with differences to walk a new path of appreciation and acceptance, not merely tolerance. This is how participants are empowered to overcome fear and mend divisions within and among their faiths. With less or without fear they are able to create safe spaces where they are enabled to take risks to deal with difficult issues and acquire uncomfortable knowledge and learning. At the same time they are able to assert their position and be understood by others. It believes gains a better understanding of one own faith through discovering more about others. It subsequently rectifies the myth of religious superiority and enhances discovery of paths to understand and acquire truth which is manifested in diverse forms. New exploration and insight sprung from the mutual learning process and lead to intrapersonal transformation which creates the foundation for their personal spiritual journey, which is a prerequisite of cooperation with others. One of the characteristics of cooperation is to unify and inte-

grate religious differences as spiritual resources to achieve holistic and perfect peace at relational, societal, national and international levels.

Approaches to Dialogue

There is no universal format of dialogue. The process depends on the nature of participants and the contexts they represent. However there are two board approaches to dialogue. The theoretical approach refers to the exploration of differences and similarities of religions, faiths and beliefs. The means of this type of dialogue is scripture examination and sharing of perspectives, understanding and interpretation which can vary from person to person depending on the background experience of each individual. The second approach to dialogue is contextual analysis characterized by investigation of socio-economic, political and cultural factors which influence the interpretation, norms, perceptions, behaviors and relationships of faith communities. Both approaches can be combined to gain holistic comprehension of the intra and interfaith complexity.

Dialogue Framework

Four levels of dialogue to achieve holistic transformation include 1) Spiritual grounding, an intra-personal dialogue to pursue honest self-criticism and assessment of one's faith, spiritual journey, prejudices and attitudes. It encourages individuals to examine their interpretation of texts. It forms a foundation of willingness to pursue positive transformation by nurturing openness, compassion and empathy to dialogue with others both from within and other faiths. 2) Building constructive relationship: upon personal achievement of personal willingness to dialogue with others, the interpersonal interaction with members of their own faith and other faith communities is the second step to foster appreciation, respect, open communication, deep listening skills and willingness to take risk to deal with difficult questions for the purpose of going deeper in mutual relationship. 3) Mutual empowerment: The dialogue at intra faith and interfaith levels would enhance better understanding of faiths in term of history and values as well as socio-economic, cultural and political contexts of faith communities and their relationship. This phase of dialogue aims at eliminating the dividing factors and extracting liberal aspects of faiths which are regarded as peace

building resources. Therefore each faith has rich heritage to offer and through mutual learning, people of faiths are empowered and equipped with relevant skills and integrate these resources into united forces for peace. 4). Taking collective action: by this stage, it is hoped participants gain both skills and comprehend complexity of religious conflict. This phase facilitates collective planning of concrete collective short term, midterm and long term actions as an interfaith community to address common challenges and transform unjust structures and cultural violence into their common vision.

Conclusion

Religion can be used to promote both peace and violence. Unfortunately, the latter is more observed. Nonetheless, there is growing recognition of the need for interreligious understanding, appreciation and acceptance which are the prerequisite to interfaith cooperation. For that, interfaith education and dialogue are necessary for the key stakeholders in the society. This is because cooperation is only possible based on the knowledge about other religions, and not ignorance which is caused by absence of knowledge. Therefore knowing the core values of one's own and other religions is crucial. The process needs to start from childhood since a child's mind is fresh, energetic and ready to learn. Children are also vulnerable to indoctrination of false beliefs and prejudices which can be prevented by constructive interfaith civic education. It is also imperative that each religion and religious institution promotes education of other faiths. Faith and religious leaders and clergies can also play an educator role. Hence capacity-building of faith leaders and clergies as well as lay educators is required. The interfaith community needs to be proactive in reaching out to the conservatives and extremists who tend to avoid this type of effort. They can also become the spoilers, since the process of interfaith education and dialogue encourages children, youth and people to express their views and have deep reflection on religions which can be perceived by the conservative religious authorities as a threat to the status quo. Therefore skills and knowledge of constructive engagement and facilitation of intra and inter faith programs are necessary.

Based on the aforementioned analysis, intra and inter religious conflicts are not confined to religious issues and have deeper structural and cultural roots. Often there are socio-economic cultural and political elements which require collective interfaith analysis and concerted action to tackle, since no single religious community can overcome alone. Given sophisticated root causes and challenges, conventional education and dialogue per se would not suffice to address multifaceted elements of conflicts and to achieve a harmonious and tolerant society.

Therefore, an interfaith education and dialogue process can be diversified and integrated into various innovative activities such as collective history text books which encompass holistic views and narratives of all faith communities, institutionalized and community-based interfaith dialogue, text examination and progressive interpretation in the light of justice and peace, conflict analysis, trauma healing, humanitarian aid, entrepreneurship, cooperative, income generation and community development and advocacy campaigns.

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AMAN Inter-Faith Consultation on Sri Lanka was held in Colombo, October 8-9, 2012.

KASHMIRIS NEED TO CHANGE THEIR MINDSET

Dr Shabir Choudhry



Even America, Russia and China with huge military power have only one Commander in Chief each; whereas Pakistani sponsored militancy produced 150 Commanders in Chief in the Kashmir Valley in 1990. At the peak of militancy in 1990/91 there were 150 militant groups, each group had a Pakistani gun, Pakistani bullets and Pakistani training to fight the Indians (although some chose to settle personal scores against each other). Many militant groups had no more than ten militants, but they still needed a Commander in Chief, a few weeks of training in Pakistan, some guns, bullets and money; and Pakistani agencies generously provided all that.

This militancy which some Kashmiri people still claim that it was started to liberate Kashmir (although those who masterminded that say their aim was to keep India engaged in Kashmir) has also produced tens of thousands of graves, thousands of widows, thousands of orphans, thousands of disable and dishonored men, women, and children; not to mention social evils and some millionaires.

It is sad that innocent people of Jammu and Kashmir had to endure all that in name of independence since 1988/9, whereas those who started this had other objectives in mind. Their plan was not to liberate Kashmir but to use people of Kashmir to advance their agenda; and some sections of Jammu and Kashmir became victims of this proxy war.

It is painful to note that we people of Jammu and Kashmir still have not learnt anything from this tragedy and suffering. There are still many who claim it was their struggle, and Pakistan is their well wisher, despite the fact that some Pakistani Generals, writers, analysts and historians have time and again said that the aim of militancy was not to liberate Kashmir.

Most Commanders in Chief of the Kashmiri struggle were uneducated (someone with Matriculation cannot be considered as an educated man) and did not attend any staff college to complete war studies, yet these militants make lofty claims. Let us see what Lt General Shahid Aziz of Pakistan army, a man who had a remarkable career in the Pakistan army has to say about the Kashmiri militancy.

Like other military officers, Lt General Shahid Aziz also studied at very prestigious military institution. While at the National Defense University, Islamabad, in a debate on the topic of Pakistan's Kashmir policy, he criticized the policy and was perceived as a man who has lost his mind. After retiring he wrote a book titled, 'Ye Khamoshi Kahn Tak' – meaning - This silence for how long.

'What kind of policy is this, that in order to get the enemy (Indian) army entangled (in Kashmir) we spill the Kashmiri blood? Is there an end to this jihad? Is this to get some result, or this is to just keep India engaged there?' 1

These are words of a man who served the Pakistan army for many years, and held very important and sensitive posts during his long and prestigious service. He believed that the Pakistani policy in Kashmir was not to 'liberate Kashmir', but to keep India engaged there. Result of this policy was that innocent people of Jammu and Kashmir were suffering.

On the other hand some Kashmiri collaborators still try to fool people by saying that Pakistan is our 'elder brother', 'our advocator' and 'well wisher'. They still tell innocent people of Jammu and Kashmir that Pakistani strategy will liberate them; and that Pakistan is the only country which supports their struggle? Question is which struggle? Pakistani strategy, according to Lt General Shahid Aziz and many others is to keep the Indian army engaged in Kashmir; and not to liberate Kashmir.

The price of this selfish and erroneous Pakistani policy is that tens of thousands of Kashmiri people

have lost their lives, many women have been raped and still many people are unaccounted for. For how long more are we going to be sacrificed in name of elder brother and Muslim brotherhood? While commenting on situation of Pakistan, General Shahid Aziz wrote:

‘Sometime I thought for whom we should save this country. What kind of independence is this where only the powerful and rich people were independent; where justice is for sale; where exploitation (of the poor) and corruption has become an art; where concept of independence was only on a paper’. 2

Lt General Shahid Aziz narrates a story which explains the thinking of the Pakistani elite about future of Pakistan:

“One officer told him that his son went to a school where children of elite studied. Once Pakistan Air Force jets flew over Islamabad, after hearing thundering of jets, one child said war has started and these were Indian jet fighters. Another child said these were Pakistani jets and war has not started. Teacher asked how could you be so sure because you are in the classroom. The boy confidently said, my father said if war started, we will all leave Pakistan. Because we are still in Pakistan, it means the war has not started. 3”

It is clear that the ruling elite of Pakistan do not feel Pakistan has a great future. Different Muslim sects in name of religion are up in arms and are killing each other. Be they be masjids, shrines, churches, temples, hotels, shopping centers, police stations, army camps and offices of security agencies, they are all legitimate targets of these extremists. When bloody civilians die only statements of regret are issued; but when men in uniform are killed Pakistani jet fighters get in action and they also kill people, whether they are culprits or some other people.

Top Pakistani leaders and senior members of the elite have nearly all their investments outside Pakistan because they feel it is not safe to invest in their own country. Most of them have nationalities of other countries; and if situation gets out of hand they can leave the country within hours.

How ironic, that despite this thinking of the Pakistani elite and disappointing economic, political and se-

curity situation, some Pakistanis and Kashmiris urge that people of Jammu and Kashmir should join Pakistan. Don't get me wrong, I have nothing against Pakistan or the Pakistani people. However, interest of Pakistan is not my first priority; my priority is interest of people of Jammu and Kashmir. I honestly believe that Princely State of Jammu and Kashmir must be united and become independent; and that is in the best interest of India, Pakistan, people of Jammu and Kashmir, and for the peace and stability of the region.

I honestly believe joining Pakistan will be a big blunder, as Pakistan has nothing to offer to us. In any case, Pakistan after 67 long years is still fighting for its survival; and still trying to find its identity. Still there is a debate going on in Pakistan, why Pakistan was created; and no one feels safe in Islamic Republic of Pakistan.

How can anyone with common sense and welfare of the Kashmir people in mind even suggest that we should become part of this society? Pakistanis and Indians have every right to protect and promote their national interests; and we people of Jammu and Kashmir must protect Kashmiri interests.

We have to change this mindset that one country is enemy and the other is a big brother and well wisher. We people of Jammu and Kashmir must understand that India and Pakistan are our neighbor and not our masters. Both want to get Jammu and Kashmir; and welfare and independence is not their priority. Once we understand this, then it will be easy to formulate a practical policy that will help us to promote a Kashmiri interest and

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1. ‘Ye Khamoshi Kahn Tak’ – meaning - This silence for how long, page 177
2. Ibid, page 178
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Understanding the Bangsamoro Construct and its Predicaments

RJ Barrete



Muslim secessionist movements and rebel aggressions in southern Mindanao.

The framework agreement on the Bangsamoro has four annexes – normalization, revenue- generation and wealth-sharing, transitional arrangement and modalities. These levels describe and justify the Bangsamoro as an identity, a territory and as a new political entity. However, in the herald of solidarity and union of the Bangsamoro people and the Philippine government to reconstruct the political system in Mindanao, the framework offers vulnerabilities that might impede its progress.

Inclusivity and factionalization

Amidst development in the peace process, not everyone is in favor of the deal. Other militant groups such as the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) led by Nur Misuari and the Abu Sayyaf have been excluded from the talks. The Philippine government continues to fight armed splinter groups in the south and the prevalence of factionalization could arise among rebel groups in Mindanao. While the MILF negotiation with the national government seems to be in the pace of success, some of its members who favored an armed struggle for independence left and assembled a separate group called the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) that has been recently involved in minor skirmishes with the Philippine military.

The negotiation process has heavily relied on Malaysia as its mediator which opens speculations whether the Bangsamoro government will give up its claim over the Sabah separate border dispute.

Capability and resources

As part of the agreement, the new political entity will be granted authority to govern its financial resources and levy taxes appropriately as prescribed in the agreement. The new Bangsamoro government will also receive 75 percent of taxes collected in the region, the revenues from metallic minerals and some control of fishing territories. However, the question of proper mechanism and dynamics to properly run the entire financial administration and funding is vulnerably at stake. Although it is not safe to assume that the sub-state is not capable to conduct all the financial management it requires – there is a high need to build its capacity and knowledge in handling public financial resources as it now involves the quality of governance in the Bangsamoro.

Police power and territorial jurisdiction

The supervision and training of the police forces in the Bangsamoro state remains problematic and it is unclear as to where police power should emanate. Should the Bangsamoro region possess its own police power over its territory or should they still be subjected under the national government's direction? It requires a long term development program for the Bangsamoro to strengthen its police forces; and the issue of loyalty prevails if there will be two national police forces established.

Equal representation

“Transitional democracy” is to be handed to the Bangsamoro people. This requires solidarity among all Filipino people to be on the same page addressing the issue of aggressions and ending the war in the

southern Philippines. The peace development process includes a plebiscite, once the Bangsamoro Basic Law has been passed by the middle of next year, or even earlier, if current residents of the “envisioned core territory” vote to ratify its establishment. Government peace panelist Marvic Leonen said that the plebiscite is what differentiates the newly-signed agreement from the 2008 memorandum of agreement on ancestral domain initiated by the Arroyo Administration. It has been struck down by the Supreme Court and considered unconstitutional for seeking to establish a state within another sovereign state.

As the Aquino administration pushes for the new Bangsamoro region in 2016, the only way to make this new beginning worth striving for peace and development in Mindanao is the trust that the Filipino people would grant the current administration. This is going to be a long process and nobody denies the difficulties because without struggle and sacrifice, there will be no democracy.

RJ Barrete, a peace and youth advocate works as a researcher in a lobbying and political management firm in the Philippines. He is the alumni of Three Weeks Course of International Institute of Peace Studies (IIPS) 2014.



“Main Azaad Hoon (I am free)”

Mariya Salim



‘We were not allowed to enter the mosque, our men not allowed to even perform wudu in the mosque’. Taslim bi told me when I recently met her at a meeting in Madhya Pradesh, India.

Born and brought up in a modern Indian Muslim

Family, I had grown up being told that Islam does not believe in a class/caste distinction and is based on the principle of equality. After hearing Taslim bi I went back to Surah al Hajurat: 49:13 “O mankind, indeed We have created you from male and female and made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another. Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you. Indeed, Allah is Knowing and Acquainted”.

Although the Qur’anic teachings reiterate egalitarianism and equality, differentiation between two Muslims on the basis of birth, occupation etc still remains a defining characteristic of large numbers in the Muslim community in India, with those belonging to the high caste referred to as Ashrafs and those who belong to the supposed ‘low caste’ are called Ajlafs.

This article however does not explain caste in the Muslim community in India but will focus on the life and struggles of Taslim bi, belonging to a ‘low caste’ community, and how from cleaning the ‘Night soil’ or human excreta formerly, she is today a liberated woman fighting for the cause of Manual scavengers, liberating thousands like her from the inhumane livelihood. Taslim bi may not be a well known human rights activist but her story is that of courage and continued struggle and deserves to be shared.

Taslim bi, who hails from Ujjain in Madhya Pradesh, is a Muslim who belongs to the hela community.

The hela Community is known to be traditionally involved in cleaning and sweeping as their main occupation. She grew up seeing her maternal side cleaning the ‘Night soil’ or cleaning people’s dry toilets, removing human excreta manually every morning. After marrying into a family which did not follow the same occupation, she started the work there as well, since she never thought of it as derogatory. What was interesting to note was that, when she moved into her in-laws house, she had to work very hard to earn quite a large sum of money, which she paid to those who had been cleaning the dry toilets in the area close to her new home, and ‘bought’ the right from them to now be the new owner of these toilets, having the sole right to clean them! “The job gave me money to feed my family. I never thought that there is anything wrong with it. It was only when our children told us of the discrimination they faced in schools that we started questioning our own livelihood”. Taslim bi shared with me how the men in the community were not allowed in mosques, their children asked to clean the latrines in the schools or Anganwadis (Village Courtyards) that they went to and made to sit separately behind the class as well as given separate utensils to eat.

Civil society played a major role in helping the community make the transition it has made. Taslim bi shared how two NGO’s started interacting with them, and though they resisted initially, in due course they understood the discrimination they were meted with because of the work they did, by the same people whose filth they cleaned! They were also made aware of the diseases the work would cause, as they would carry the excreta in baskets over their heads and the filth would trickle down their skins, causing skin diseases, infections etc. She stopped doing this work and went from village to village with the support of some NGO’s to encourage those in the profession to take up an alternative livelihood.

Today through their struggle, she along with many like her have been successful in freeing over 30,000 women from 25 districts in India from the inhumane profession of Manual Scavenging. They walked from village to village, taking with them more and more 'converts' and ended their journey with the symbolic burning of baskets and brooms that were otherwise used to clean other people's waste. Those who gave up the profession have started engaging in alternate livelihood options such as selling fruits, vegetables etc.

With the 1993 Employment of Manual Scavengers and Construction of Dry Latrines (Prohibition) Act, to eliminate manual scavenging, having proved not

as effective, and with CSO's like the Safai Karmchari Andolan and Jan Sahas and many others working endlessly to end manual scavenging in the country, a new bill seeking to prohibit employment of individuals as manual scavengers by prescribing stringent punishment, including imprisonment up to five years, was passed by Parliament in September 2013.

Taslim bi's story and that of many like her who had the courage to come out of this bondage may not be known to many but deserves to be heard. Today, Taslim bi, though economically in the same condition as before is a free woman she tells me, "Main Azaad hoon" (I am free).

Mariya Salim started her career at AMAN as the editor of AMANA and regional program coordinator. She now works on issues of minority rights and secularism in New Delhi, India at the Centre for Peace Studies.

“Empowerment of Muslim women is not possible until she overcomes all such restrictions imposed on her by the feudal society.”

- Asghar Ali Engineer on Muslim Women, Orthodoxy and Change -

The Quran and Religious Tolerance

Waris Mazhari



The Quran stresses religious tolerance, this being an important Islamic principle. Religious tolerance necessarily means that people should be not be coerced into following a particular religion. This is entirely in consonance

with Islam. The Quran (2:256) insists 'There shall be no compulsion in religion'. The occasion for the revelation of this verse further clarifies the Quranic understanding of religious tolerance. This verse was revealed in connection with a certain Muslim from among the 'Helpers' (Ansars) of Madinah named Abul Husain, who had two sons. It is said that they had become Christians when they were young and had been taken to Syria. Abul Husain mentioned this to the Prophet. He wanted that his children should be made to embrace Islam. This Quranic verse was revealed in this regard.

The Quran clearly states that human beings have the right to choose whatever religion or ideology they like. It is against God's Cosmic Plan that everyone should follow one religion—Islam. Thus, the Quran says:

Had your Lord pleased, all the people on earth would have believed in Him, without exception. So will you compel people to become believers? (10:99)

[...]and had God so willed, He would have made you all a single community, but He did not so will, in order that He might try you by what He has given you (5:48)

In this way, the Quran has accepted both faith and denial as eternal and natural realities. The Quran (22:69) clearly states that God will judge with regard to faith and denial on the Day of Judgment:

On the Day of Resurrection, God will judge between you regarding your differences.

Meanwhile, in this world, even deniers have freedom in matters of religion. As the Quran (109:6) says:

Say, '[...] You have your religion and I have mine.'

The deniers also have freedom of action in this world, as the Quran (42:15) says:

'[...]we are responsible for what we do and you are responsible for what you do [...]

Further, the Quran (6:108) forbids the believers from abusing false deities worshipped by others:

Do not revile those [beings] whom they invoke instead of God, lest they, in their hostility, revile God out of ignorance.

The Quran (16:125) advises Muslims to adopt a beautiful approach in reasoning with others:

Call to the way of your Lord with wisdom and fair exhortation and reason with them in a way that is best.

The believers are advised to always act justly:

Believers, be strict in upholding justice and bear witness for the sake of God, even though it be against yourselves, your parents, or your kindred (4:135)

The Quranic insistence on justice does not apply just among Muslims themselves. Rather, it relates to the whole of humankind, and Muslims are expected to act justly with everyone, irrespective of religion or community:

O you who believe! Stand out firmly for Allah and be just witnesses and let not the enmity and hatred of others make you avoid justice. Be just: that is nearer to piety, and fear Allah. Verily, Allah is Well-Acquainted with what you do (5:8)

The Quran provides for full religious freedom for members of other faiths, who also have the right to judge their affairs according to their scriptures. They even have the right to deal in things that Islam considers forbidden or haram, such as alcohol and pork.

The Quran talks about two types of disbelievers. The first are those who have unleashed aggression and war against Muslims, who refuse to give Muslims their religious and social rights and who have made the Prophet and his Companions a target of their oppression, forcing them out of their homes and lands. The Quran advises stern measures against them, granting permission for engaging in war in defence against their oppression.

On the other hand are those disbelievers or deniers of the Truth who are not bent on waging war against Muslims and who have not compelled Muslims to leave their homes. The Quran (60:8) advises Muslims to deal with them with gentleness and goodness:

He does not forbid you to deal kindly and justly with anyone who has not fought you on account of your faith or driven you out of your homes: God loves the just.

It is important to consider here that the Quran considers even the fiercest enemy to be a potential friend. Thus, it says (41:34):

Good and evil deeds are not equal. Repel evil with what is better; then you will see that one who was once your enemy has become your dearest friend [...]

This Quranic wisdom is related to the fact that every human being, even one's staunchest foe, is born on the same natural state of man or fitrah, and fitrah has a tendency to like what is good. It is external factors that become a barrier to some people's acceptance of goodness and truth. As the Prophet is said to have noted:

Every child is born in a state of fitrah, then his parents make him into a Jew or a Christian or a Magian.

The Quran basically addresses this fitrah, which requires love and gentleness, not hate and sternness.

Another expression of the Quranic spirit of tolerance is the fact that the Quran (31:15) commands Muslims who have non-Muslim parents to deal with them in a good manner:

Yet be kind to them in this world and follow the path of those who turn to Me.

The Prophet issued regular grants to some Jewish people, and this carried on even after his demise. When the Prophet died, his coat-of-mail had been pledged to a Jew in exchange for a loan. The Prophet could have taken a loan from a Muslim, but he did what he did in order to teach people this lesson in tolerance and virtue.

The Quran, as is readily evident from this discussion, reflects a universal notion of religious tolerance. If this is not reflected in Muslims' behavior, the fault lies with Muslims themselves, and not with the Quran.

Waris Mazhari is a graduate of the Dar ul-Uloom Deoband. He did his Ph.D from the Department of Islamic Studies, Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi, and is presently teaching Islamic Studies at the Maulana Azad National Urdu University, Hyderabad. He can be contacted on w.mazhari@gmail.com

Book Review: Kahlil Gibran's *The Prophet*

"How shall I go in peace and without sorrow?"

Jasmine Ferrer



This is one of the opening lines of the oeuvre by the Lebanese writer and artist Kahlil Gibran, a classic which continue to timelessly captivate readers. Originally published in 1923 and then translated into over 40 languages, this slim novel consists of

twenty-six elegantly written pieces of Proseharkening to an invitation to listen to a master storyteller tell his tales. Gibran seem to effortlessly weave words together which then evoke philosophical discussion or quietly enable one to self-reflect. His riveting black and white images accompanying each piece of prose also enhance the contemplative mood, inviting the reader to stay and take a breather, to ponder, and to have perspectives regarding the mundane concerns to life's complex offerings.

Interestingly, the novel starts with Almustafa, 'the chosen and the beloved,' bound to leave the city of Orphalese. This context alone should be lauded-the idea of 'departure' from the complacent and comfortable, to the uncertain yet rewarding journey of 'arrival' reflect one's internal journey, the continuous voyage for seeking and experiencing the various questions and evolving changes one goes through in his life. He was then urged by the townspeople, particularly the seeress Almitra, to "...speak to us and give us your truth." He then proceeded to share his thoughts, discussed separately per prose, on love, marriage, children, giving, eating and drinking, work, joy and sorrow, houses, clothes, buying and selling, crime and punishment, laws, freedom, reason and passion, pain, self-knowledge, teaching, friendship, talking, time, good and evil, prayer, pleasure, beauty, religion, and lastly, death. What strings all these together is Gibran's emphasis on human capacity (or lack thereof) to strive for unity, faith that is

not dominated by blind dogma, to practice compassion for self and others, to favor open dialogue over closed harsh judgments, and to wage for peace even if it's a struggle. Moreover, he highlighted that human beings, for all their triumphs and achievements, despite their flaws and limitations, need to be nourished beyond physical needs, accepted not just tolerated, and ultimately, to love and be loved.

At the outset, it may seem that Gibran's work is abstract given that his style of writing and choice of metaphors are too ideal, even 'romantic.' However, it should be noted that *The Prophet* was written at a time of tumult and the rise of Western counterculture in the 1960s, wherein issues on opposition of militarization were prevalent, promotion of human rights and advancement of feminism were on the rise, to cite a few. If one overcomes and casts off initial misgivings, one would be rewarded and enthralled with Gibran's writing brilliance and depth of his work, making the material less intimidating to read and downright enjoyable. Here are some of the passages that showcase his luminous thoughts:

On Love:

"For even as love crowns you so shall he crucify you. Even as he is for your growth so is he for your pruning.

Even as he ascends to your height and caresses your tenderest branches that quiver in the sun, So shall he descend to your roots and shake them in their clinging to the earth.

On Marriage:

"Love one another, but make not a bond of love: Let it rather be a moving sea between the shores of your souls.

Fill each other's cup but drink not from one cup. Give one another of your bread but eat not from the same loaf.

*Sing and dance together and be joyous, but each one of you be alone,
Even as the strings of a lute are alone though they quiver with the same music.*

*Give your hearts, but not into each other's keeping.
For only the hand of Life can contain your hearts.
And stand together yet not too near together:
For the pillars of the temple stand apart,
And the oak tree and the cypress grow not in each other's shadow.*

On Pain:

*"Your pain is the breaking of the shell that encloses your understanding.
Even as the stone of the fruit must break, that its heart may stand in the sun, so must you know pain.
And could you keep your heart in wonder at the daily miracles of your life, your pain would not seem less wondrous than your joy;
And you would accept the seasons of your heart, even as you have always accepted the seasons that pass over your fields.
And you would watch with serenity through the winters of your grief.
Much of your pain is self-chosen.
It is the bitter potion by which the physician within you heals your sick self."*

On Good and Evil:

*"Of the good in you I can speak, but not of the evil.
For what is evil but good tortured by its own hunger and thirst?
Verily when good is hungry it seeks food even in dark caves, and when it thirsts it drinks even of dead waters."*

Each piece of prose can be read independently from one another thus again, not making the text overwhelming or the ideas daunting. In my opinion, this enables the reader to appreciate the sincerity of the thought and to digest its resonance, regardless of status, age, faith, gender or geography. As such, this then makes Gibran's work as relevant and valuable now as it then was.

At present, in a time where everything is hastened, information is condensed, and conflict and suffering seem to be the norm, reading The Prophet provides a welcome respite. Ideally to be leisurely read, the ideas presented are meant to be savored and shared since like a true master storyteller, Gibran's The Prophet leaves us with questions to ponder, learning to deliberate upon, and to act on, even after the story's ending.

Jasmine Ferrer is an independent researcher. Her research works are on peace, conflict, gender and community empowerment, particularly in Southeast Asia. She's also the Program Officer for Nonviolence International-Southeast Asia 'Building Peace by Teaching Peace' program, a project aimed at conducting and training peace education and research in Pattani, Thailand. For questions or further discussions, you may get in touch with her through: jasminevferrer@gmail.com.

MUSLIM YOUTH FORUM 2014 MYANMAR

DECLARATION OF THE FIRST MUSLIM YOUTH FORUM

A Muslim youth forum was held on 22-23rd February 2014 with the participation of various ethnic Muslims and national Muslim youth groups living in different parts of the States and Divisions of Myanmar to discuss under various topics.

According to the objectives of this Muslim Youth Forum, youth groups discussed various topics to bring out a singular voice on living in unity with the diverse cultures and traditions of Myanmar and to find out ways to promote interactions between different faith groups of Myanmar.

The topics were:

- (1) Education and Youth
- (2) Empowerment
- (3) Capacity-Building and Youth
- (4) Human Rights
- (5) Democracy, Development and Youth
- (6) Peace, Multiculturalism and Youth
- (7) Health, Sport and Youth
- (8) Media, Information Technology and Youth
- (9) Environment and Youth
- (10) Human Resources, Job Opportunities and Youth
- (11) Leadership and Youth

The outcomes are:

- (1) In the educational sector, to promote a dual curriculum system of modern and religious education and to keep away extremism by all means.
- (2) To empower Muslim youth with leadership capacity.
- (3) To advocate and to promote dialogue to create and to revive common traditions leading to elimination of discrimination among different faith groups.

- (4) To promote good media conduct and to thwart the misconduct of media through legal channels.
- (5) To advocate for transparency, mutual understanding, friendship, promoting peace and multiculturalism.
- (6) To promote the values of self reliance and to respect the collective efforts among Muslim youth.
- (7) To promote and be involved in a transition to democracy that respects the dignity of the population and human rights without any discrimination.
- (8) To encourage Muslim youth groups to patriotically participate in the process of Government's efforts at democratic transition in the fields of such as human rights and development.
- (9) To promote and restore the rights of Muslim women in accordance with Islamic Scriptures and Rules.
- (10) To promote sports among Muslim youth community in respect o- their health and to fully participate in community and State-building.
- (11) To promote and to raise awareness among youth to safeguard the environment.
- (12) To promote reading habits among youth and to create libraries, Islamic museums and reading spaces.

We hereby declare that, by continuously holding Muslim Youth Forums, we intend to reach the above objectives through the collective efforts of all stakeholders and involve all Muslim Youth to participate in State-building, in line with the process of the Government of the Union of Myanmar.

***First Muslim Youth Forum
February 23, 2014 - Thanlyin***

Letters to the Editor

I thought this was a very thought provoking issue – I wish the message would be heard far and wide as it is very hard to disagree, even though so many people are so intolerant of others that they do not heed the message.

I was surprised to see the Bushes in the same sentence as Hitler. Whatever one thinks of the US and its presidents, I do not think that any such comparison is fair. The Bushes may not have always been right but they did what they believed was right. They sought to free people from tyrants and never enriched themselves.

Anthony .G. Coughlan
USA

The 8th Volume of the AMANA magazine tackled the vitality of spirituality in today's world, where modern technology plays a major role. I really appreciated the articles that discussed the concept of forgiveness at the international level and the art of apology.
Best of luck for the next volume

Heba Tannira
Palestine

The theme on the spiritual global crisis seems perfect to portray the world today which is one mixed of hope and despair. Hope for better future, symbolized by the global revolutionary wave and worldwide demands for human dignity and social justice. Despair for religious supremacy and real democracy which push to crisis. This crisis is structural and global but it ultimately cannot be triumphed over without a reassertion of our spiritual greatness as conscious agents of social change.

Swechchha Dahal
Kathmandu, Nepal.

The AMANA magazine was initiated in 2005 following suggestions made at the first round of the Asian Muslim Action Network (AMAN) 'Peace Studies & Conflict Transformation' course. In Arabic, Amana means trust and embodies the primary objective of the publication in highlighting peace initiatives, peace collaboration, progressive Muslim action, and inter-faith cooperation and understanding. To ensure a wide distribution range and to connect with grass-roots communities, AMANA is printed in English, Bahasa Indonesia and Thai.

AMAN supports holistic development through awareness building with an overall aim of mobilizing and sharing resources in order to help marginalized groups in Asia. AMAN aims to build understanding and solidarity among Muslims and other faith communities towards people's empowerment, human rights, justice and peace. With over 1500 members, the network of AMAN spans Asia and is coordinated from Bangkok, Thailand.

Publications: AMANA Magazine and AMANA news online

Focus: Islam and peace; inter-faith partnerships; development initiatives; human rights; gender and peace.

Further information about AMANA magazine is available at www.aman-asia.org

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