RESEARCH ARTICLE

Teachings to Maintain Coexistence in a Plural Society: An Indian Perspective with Reference to Hinduism and Islam.

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Abstract

Coexistence is a state in which two or more groups are living together while respecting their differences and resolving their conflicts nonviolently. Coexistence has been defined in numerous ways i.e.to exist together (in time or place) and to exist in mutual tolerance, to learn to recognize and live with difference, to have a relationship between persons or groups in which none of the parties is trying to destroy the other, to interact with a commitment to tolerance, mutual respect, and the agreement to settle conflicts without recourse to violence. Coexistence is only a first stage that necessarily has to be followed by more progressive steps of equal integration on the way to constructing a multicultural society

At the core of coexistence is the awareness that individuals and groups differ in numerous ways including class, ethnicity, religion, gender, and political inclination. A state of coexistence provides psychological and physical conditions for individuals, organizations, and/or communities to reduce tensions, and for peacemakers to attempt to resolve the causes of the conflict. Teachings for coexistence refers to the process through which society members are supposed to acquire the beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors that are in line with the ideas of coexistence The objectives of education for coexistence are to form values, motivations, beliefs, attitudes, emotions, and behavior patterns among children and adolescents that are conducive to coexistence. On a practical level, teachings for coexistence requires transmission of knowledge, creation of experiences, and development of skills which can help to develop the psychological repertoire that accepts, recognizes respects, legitimizes, humanizes, and personalizes the rival or discriminated group.

The present paper will discuss the role of Hindu and Islamic teaching to maintain a culture of coexistence in a plural society. The main question of this article is what methods, principles and strategies have been offered by these two major religions to its followers to enable them live with other human beings in peaceful manner. On the other hand this paper explores the provisions of Indian constitution for peaceful coexistence. In the end I will discuss what are the threads and challenges of peaceful coexistence in Indian society and how we can resolve it.

The Indian subcontinent is an important region belongs to cultural, ethnic, and religious heterogeneity; another is common unifying traditions. India is marked by great disparities, inequalities, and multicultural characteristics. It is a home to the largest number of Muslims in the world. Over long periods of time; India has been shaped by cooperation between religions and languages, between cultures and ethnic groups, between urban and rural life, and between locals and immigrants. Despite frictions and conflicts, coexistence has always been surprisingly harmonious.

India is a land of unity in diversity where people of different lifestyles and manners live together. They belong to different religions, beliefs and faiths in God. In spite of all these diversity, they live together with the bond of humanity and brotherhood. Unity in diversity is the distinct feature of India which makes it famous all around the world. Generally, people in India are following the great old Indian culture of being tolerant and absorbing which make them assimilating in nature. Unity in diversity in almost all aspects of the society has become source of strength and wealth all through the country. People of all religions do worship in different ways by following their own rituals and beliefs which represents the existence of underlying uniformity. Unity in diversity promotes spirit of harmony and brotherhood among people beyond their considerations of various diversities.

With a share of 80 percent of the population, India's majority religion is Hinduism, followed by Islam at somewhat more than 13 percent and none of the Indian religious communities is homogenous. Hinduism as the characteristic feature of the country is a 'federation of beliefs', a fabric of faith with open interpretation schemes that has grown over thousands of years. Peace-loving and tolerant at its core, Hinduism, unlike Islam, is in no way opposed to the values of the Western world. However, Islam appears as multifaceted in India as Hinduism, reflecting the diversity of Indian identities. In Uttar Pradesh, the Muslims are divided into the Ashraf and the non-Ashraf castes. Moreover, dividing lines between Shiites, Sunnites, and other sects are running throughout India. And finally, there are also cultural differences between the Muslims in the north and those in the south.

A state of coexistence in a region like India provides psychological and physical conditions for individuals, organizations or communities to reduce tensions, and for peacemakers to attempt to resolve the causes of the conflict. Coexistence work is that which brings individuals, communities or nations away from violence and towards social cohesion .This includes efforts that aim to address past wrongs, search for justice and forgiveness, build and rebuild communities, and explore ways for community structures and systems to embody fairness, justice, and equity. Coexistence means recognition in the existence of the other group with its differences, which may be in the realm of goals, values, ideology, religion, race, nationality, ethnicity, culture, and other domains. This recognition implies that the groups have the same right to exist and live in peace and acknowledges the legitimacy of the differences between them. Moreover, there is also recognition in the legitimacy of the groups to raise contentions and grievances that are then resolved in nonviolent ways. Each group is ready to deal with them as causes to the deterioration of their intergroup relations. Coexistence implies personalization of the members of the other group-that is, viewing them as humane individuals with legitimate needs, aspirations and goals. Coexistence requires recognition in the principle of equal status and treatment of the other group(s), without superiority. This principle applies to negotiations as well as to other types of contacts. Coexistence implies that although conflict and disagreement may still be intact, the involved groups have decided to abandon violent ways of confrontation and choose peaceful means to achieve their goals. It means that the groups are ready to establish mechanisms of negotiation to deal with the list of contentions in order to resolve them.

The 21st century has   increased a complex international political system and a multifaceted field of stakeholders, we must adapt to the realities of conflict, violence, and combat. Efforts to mainstream the notion of coexistence in both the peace building and conflict-resolution fields and in everyday interaction are a priority. The opportunity that increased coexistence presents -- a reduction in violence, an active embracing of diversity, and collaboration within and across fields - is of increasing value and significance worldwide. In the present time coexistence should provide a needed pause from violence, and a springboard into stronger, more respectful inter-group relationships.

The two major religions and its teachings i.e. Hinduism and Islam in India may be consider as a comprehensive to serve the groups of people and specially aimed to address the needs of all humanity with its moral, spiritual, social, legal, political and economic systems. Its moral purity and clarity, simplicity in a faith and comprehensive prohibition of all types of criminality, oppression and injustice to all classes and categories of people, regardless of race, culture, education, social and economic status. The aim should be to establish the ideal human society and brotherhood spreading general benevolence and the divine guidance among men for their betterment and salvation. Part of its mission is to establish justice at all times and at all levels, to maintain amicable relations as long as there are no open acts of hostilities, and to promote peace whenever possible. In this article I have mention the teachings of Hinduism and Islam to maintain a culture of coexistence in a plural

society. In present circumstances it is a challenge for those who are secular and progressive minded but the provisions in Indian constitution and the tolerance nature of Indian society are our strength.

Teachings on Justice:-
In Hinduism 'Nyaya' and in Islam 'Adl' (justice and fair treatment) has discussed in different context. It is clearly mentioned that being a human it is first responsibility to maintain the culture of fair treatment not only in family it should be for the whole humanity. In Hinduism and Islam are characterized by justice and fair treatment at all times and toward everybody. Both Geeta, Mahabharata and Quran have ordered peoples to be just when passing judgment others .It is clearly mentioned in Quran that you do justice on non-Muslims and religious minorities (Quran verse 5: 42). Acting upon justice will become more important when justice is applied to others opponents and enemies. In both religions holy books have advised its followers to do justice even if the result is against themselves or their relatives. Administration of justice is a strategic approach to peaceful coexistence in any human society.

Teachings to Respect People's Rights:-
Another important teaching for the coexistence is related to people's rights in a respectful manner. The concept of "right" meaning people's rights which has been underlined in Hinduism and Islam is among the most profound and complex concepts in politics and social sciences. "Right" has vast meanings which cover all material and immaterial aspects of human life, so that, if a person wastes another person's time or makes them sad, he would be held accountable both in this world and the Hereafter. The important point in human life and for coexistence of people with different attitudes and religions is that nobody should ignore another person's rights and should fully respect those rights.

The unity and its bonds in India is a good example of peaceful coexistence and on the other hand article 14 of our constitution allowed for followers of different religions to live in peace and carry out their rituals without anybody harassing them. A common tenet of Hinduism is "Sarva Dharma Sambhava", which literally means that all Dharmas (truths) are equal to or harmonious with each other. In recent times this statement has been taken as meaning "all religions are the same" - that all religions are merely different paths to God or the same spiritual goal. Based on this logic the religious path that one takes in life is a matter of personal preference. One's choice in religion is merely incidental and makes no real difference in the spiritual direction of one's life. Any path is as good as any other. The important thing is to follow a path. However since the religion of one's birth is not only as good as any other, but is the closest to access and easiest to understand, one should usually follow it whatever it may happen to be.
In Islam the Arabic word "*naas*" has been used to mean people in nine cases, to mean citizens in thirteen cases, and to mean the public in three cases. Ali first Shiite Imam and son in law of Prophet Muhammad considers being human a sufficient criterion to entitle every person to human and citizenship rights and he has noted that this criterion cannot be ignored under any conditions, is part of the essence of humanity, and does not leave humans as long as they are alive. In all instances, Ali has taken an equal approach to humans regardless of their tribes, nationality, or religion. The important point is that when Ali talked about non-Muslims, he did not just talk about their rights and peaceful coexistence because this can be ensured through laws. He, however, talked about compassionate approach to all human beings because being human, per se, was enough for him to love others and treat them through a respectful and dignified approach.

Teachings to Respect Peoples:-
Insulting people and disrespecting them has not been allowed under any circumstances. In Hinduism there are several examples which is sufficient to understand that Hinduism never promoted insult or disrespect to peoples even in the battle of Mahabharata Krishna asked Arjun to protect the Dharma(right path) and Arjun did not insult or abuse his enemy .All Pandavas have respect for elders though they were against in battle of Mahabharata. Similarly when Ram went to forest for fourteen years he did not insult and shows disrespect to his step mother Kaiykayi.

On the other hand Islam also considers respect for religious minorities in an Islamic society an obligation and has forbidden it as it has forbidden backbiting of other Muslims. Muslims have been also forbidden to slander non-Muslims.

The treaty between Prophet Mohammad and Christians in Madina city stipulated that the Christians should not be insulted in any way. A friend of Imam Jafar Sadiq(Sixth Shiite Imam or religious leader) insulted his black servant and his mother. Imam Jafar Sadiq became very angry and asked why he had done that. The friend noted that the servant was not Muslim and his mother had not been wed according to the Islamic law. Imam Jafar Sadiq retorted by saying that every nation has its own marriage customs. Then he told his friend to get away from him and was never seen with him again.

Teachings to Recognize Diversity of Religions:-
Any phenomenon can be viewed from right and wrong angles and as an objective reality. When it comes to peaceful coexistence, diversity of religions and perceptions it becomes an objective reality. There is a quotation in the Rig Veda (1.164.46): "Ekam Sat, viprah bahudha vadanti," meaning "Truth is one, sages describe it variously." It conveys a core Hindu idea: that there can be multiple valid viewpoints about the Supreme. Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, philosopher and former president of India, stressed this point: "The Hindu recognizes one Supreme Spirit, though different names are given to it."The Books like Geeta and Mahabharata or Ramayana which recognize the true essence of religion and ask their followers to act according to their own faiths and religious backgrounds. From this viewpoint, humans are dignified and no society, regardless of its circumstances, will ever lose its human essence. Quran declares that God has created all humans from a single man and a single woman and has divided them into various groups to know one another (Quran verse 49:13).
 If God had wanted to create people with the same faith, he would have done that, but He had not done it on purpose. Quran has noted that there is no coercion in accepting a particular faith or religion (Quran verse 2: 256)., but has also specified that if God wanted, He could have made all people Muslims but God has decided to let them choose their way and also see the results .He has ordered Prophet Mohammad that his sole duty is to promulgate the message of God and has no right to force people into accepting his religion. Therefore, every person is responsible for their own Karma or Amal (conduct and acts); if they chose the right path, they would have done justice to themselves and if they chose unwisely, they would harm their own cause.
In fact pluralism in religion is more important than unity. A respect for different Dharmas is more important than making all Dharmas the same. If we accept pluralism in religion – that there are many different religions which teach different and sometimes contrary things and that people should be free to follow whatever religion they wish, emphasizing the discovery of truth – this would go farther in creating religious tolerance than calling all religions the same, which they clearly are not.

Restrictions on Conversion:-
In Hindu religion Sarva Dharma Sambhava is equated with the idea that "Truth is one but the paths are many." There is indeed One Truth and there is no limit as to the number of potential paths to it, whether inside religion as we know it or beyond it. This plurality of paths is as important a principle as the unity of Truth. There are many and diverse paths to truth that cannot be limited or stereotyped along one approach, however useful that approach may be. Different individuals possess different temperaments and are at different stages of spiritual growth. Therefore a variety of approaches must be offered to meet the various needs of living beings. We must respect this pluralism of paths as much as the Unity of Truth or we will turn that infinite unity into an exclusive path or rigid uniformity in which both the one truth and the many paths are denied. The pluralism of paths is the basis of religious freedom and freedom of inquiry through which alone we can discover what is real. Hinduism does not actively pursue religious conversions. Underlying this is the belief that a person becomes a Hindu because of past karmas. If a person is not ready, there is no point in trying to convert him and interfere with his karmic destiny.

In Islam the Quran does not allow its followers to use force as an instrument for the spread of Islam. Islam gives free choice in case of religion by declaring: "There is no compulsion in matters of faith. Surely the right now became distinct from wrong" (Quran verse 2: 256).The holy Quran recognizes diversity in matters of faith by saying: "To every nation have we appointed rites and ceremonies which they follow, so let them not then dispute with thee on the matter" (Quran verse 22: 67).

To understand the peaceful coexistence in a plural society I want to clear another controversial term which is mentioned in Islam is Jihad. Jihad is the most misunderstood and wrongly construed doctrine of Islam in the West. It is usually supposed to be the main hurdle in world peace. That misconception is due to the lack of understanding of the true concept of jihad. In Islamic perspective Jihad is persistent struggle against forces of darkness both within and without. Literally "Jihad" means "to strive" or "to exert efforts". Jihad consists of two

dimensions: the inner jihad that seeks to curb negative and self-destructive forces within; and the external jihad which is a struggle against violence and tyranny by means of words and actions. The Prophet Muhammad explained that "the greatest jihad is the one a person carries out against his lower soul". "Lower soul" here means selfish desires and ambitions. Apart from spiritual meanings, struggle in the physical sense is also considered as "jihad" for which the exact word is *Qital* (war*)*. However, the holy Quran lays down strict principles of *Qital* (war) in its various verses. The war can be waged only for lawful purpose: In defense when one is attacked, or to eradicate corruption from the earth or for elimination of persecution, or for getting moral, religious and physical freedom for oppressed people.

When Islam forbids the old cruel and barbaric practices in war, it makes its own rules for the conduct of hostilities which are on-combatants are not to be made to suffer on account of war. Even against the combatants, one can use only that much force which is necessary to achieve the purpose of just war but not going beyond the limits. God does not love those who go beyond the limits. (Quran verse 2:190).If the enemy offers peace, one has no choice but to accept, and stop all hostilities .One can not commit excesses or cruelties during the actual conduct of hostilities and war. Arson and pillage are prohibited. Destruction of properties, plants and crops is forbidden .Killing of Women, children, aged ones, handicapped and prisoners of war is prohibited. On the other hand generous treatment with the prisoners is ordained. Places of worship are to be spared and protected. All these points are described in various Quranic verses and saying of Prophet Muhammad. Islam considers the killing of an innocent person tantamount to the killing of whole humanity.

When the Turks came to India in the middle ages, they were the first to proclaim the traditions of the Ulema and the teachings of the Sufis. Of these, Sufism proved to be the formative feature. It became the moral and charismatic force which counterbalanced the strict demands of the Ulema, especially as it emphasized the unity of God and ascribed great importance to virtue. Moreover, Sufism still is a factor for peace in India's multi - religious landscape, as it postulates openness towards those of a different faith. It is thanks to Sufism that Wahhabism and, thus, religious radicalism found no fertile soil in India.

Teachings about Agreement on Commonalties:-
There are commonalties and differences among human beings. It seems that differences are more pervasive than common grounds. However, human beings usually engage in political and social interactions on the basis of common views and interests and do various things through cooperation. Naturally, under these circumstances, differences which have nothing to do with human interactions should be forgotten. To reach an agreement on the basis of faith with peoples over commonalties as this will be the firmest ground for peaceful coexistence. When people interact or when different groups live in the same society, every one of them has their own notions, viewpoints or common interests. If there is no common ground between two persons, at least, they are equal in creation and have descended from the same parents.
They have been divided according to their living conditions and along social, historical, and geographical lines into various groups, ethnicities, and nationalities with different attitudes, demands and interests. As persons and groups get close in terms of ideologies, attitudes, cultures and material interests the number of those crossing points' increases. Therefore, such common factors should form the basis of any decision or action aimed at realizing peaceful coexistence at national and international levels. Anyway, groups or countries are sure to share common interests which can form a confluence framework for them. If there are no other common grounds, at least, they share their human essence and this can be taken as a basis for conclusion of the most basic contracts. Depending on the type of society, common grounds among human beings and minorities should be taken as a starting point for any agreement.

Freedom of Religion and Tolerance for Coexistence:-
Peoples of different religious communities must recognize that other religions often teach something different about God, truth, salvation or liberation than they do. For peaceful coexistence in a plural society **rather than pretending these differences do not exist we should acknowledge them and allow people the freedom to examine these. Equality of religions has been used to try to create tolerance through uniformity, but true tolerance is based upon freedom to be different, not on the assertion of some artificial sameness. We should tolerate all people, even if they do not agree with us. Tolerance of differences creates harmony, not pretending that differences do not exist. In fact if we only tolerate people if we make them the same as we are, we are not really being tolerant at all.**

The Bhagavad Gita clearly upholds the practice of tolerance. It firmly declares that the paths to God are many and all reach Him only in the end. It also encourages people to practice their own dharma instead of following that of others, even if it is superior. The scripture clearly distinguishes divine qualities from demonic ones and the need to follow virtue and righteousness in one's conduct.

In a free society religious belief should be a personal matter. There should be no government enforced religious beliefs or dogmas. There should be political tolerance of all religious views as long as these do not involve violent or antinational activities. On the political level it should not matter whether one believes in any religion at all, much less what religion a person may believe in? Political tolerance of religious views, however, does not mean that individuals have to accept all religious views as right or good. In a free society one can be an atheist or agnostic or believe in any religion. In multi faith dialogues throughout the world there is recognition of certain commonalties in religion of moral goodness but recognition of many differences as well, particularly in regard to metaphysical beliefs. These differences are too significant to cover over.
A truly free and tolerant social order should be based on respect for all people and respect for all life. This means respect for the individual and not imposing any collective or politically enforced idea of religious truth upon them. We should recognize our unity as human beings, even though our religions may have as many differences as they may have commonalities. The correct principle of a truly free society is not the equality of religions but freedom from domination by religious dogmas.
This means that everyone should be free to follow or to question religion as they so choose.

Conclusion:-
India's democratic foundation was laid by the independence movement; while today's democratic process is based on a flexible and constant dialogue between all societal and religious groups. The institutional framework leaves room for objections and dissenting opinions; however, extreme political positions never attract a majority. India's Muslims know that they are equal partners in the democratic society of the country, which grants them those liberties the fundamentalist interpretation of Islam does not allow, and takes its constitutional obligations seriously by prohibiting religious discrimination and protecting minorities.

All leading politicians in India always emphasize the pluralist societal and cultural composition of the country, the 'confluence of civilisations'. And indeed, the Indian idea is not based on nationalist thought, as in the case of China, but on a long common history and a tradition kept alive for thousands of years. Against this background, India's foreign policy displays self-confidence in its rejection of unilateralism and its insistence on the need to search for peaceful means to resolve conflicts, one example being India's No when it was asked by the USA to dispatch troops to the second Iraq war in 2003. Another example is the fact that India's Muslims do not regard their country's foreign policy as threatening Islam or even aiming to oppress Muslims worldwide.

India is a convincing example of a country which successfully endeavors to guarantee multinational and multiethnic unity without imposing homogeneity on its citizens or depriving them of fundamental freedoms. It symbolizes the peaceful integration of 130 million Muslims. Yet there is no reason for complacency as India also has fallen victim to terrorism and has to face the danger. Above all, it must create a framework for the Muslims which make it more difficult for fundamentalism to mobilize this religious group. Fighting poverty, corruption, bad governance, and discrimination is as much part of the present task as finding a way to cope peacefully with social change.

In this, it is particularly important that all sides should understand that deliberately fuelled religious agitation would threaten the so-far peaceful coexistence of religions in India and prepare the ground for both Hindu and Islamic fundamentalism. **Sarva Dharma Sambhava, which is a religious idea, has become a primary political principle in India – that in order to create social harmony we must honor all religions as the same, so that religious differences do not fuel social conflicts.**
On the basis of Hindu and Islamic teachings we can understand that both religions give the message of their followers to maintain a culture of coexistence. These teachings promoted the culture of coexistence for universal brotherhood. It is a prime duty of us to think a way to maintain justice,   equality, respect, brotherhood, love and passion in a diverse society. A society needs the best reference as a guideline to live in harmony and peace. These two major religions have encouraged maintaining unity to his companions, establishing brotherhood, promoting justice, preserving equality and look forward to living in peace. It is a continuous and universal

message which will remain to all human being. The teachings mentioned in the Holy Scriptures are sufficient for us to achieve true success and to maintain the culture of peace and coexistence. In the end I will give an example from Indian society and hope on the basis of this we can understand the culture of coexistence in a right way.
In the year 1820 a Hindu ruler Jaswant Rao built the Mazar (mausoleum) to pay homage to Sayyed Baba in Lakhna town of Etawah Uttar Pradesh, India. When Hindu devotees visit Kalka Devi (Goddess Durga) temple in Lakhna town of Etawah they never forget to seek blessings of Sayyed Baba Mazar, situated in the temple premises. Same is with the Muslim devotees. For, the people believe their prayers will not be answered otherwise. Lakhna town, located close to Yamuna river in Etawah, sees Hindus and Muslims pray together at the Kalka Devi Temple and the Sayyed Baba Mazar that are adjacent to each other. The site is also sought after by people for holding marriages, 'mundan' (tonsure ceremony of Hindu children) or other rituals.

Legend has it that any prayer offered only at the Mazar or the temple is not fulfilled, as the almighty answers only those prayers that are offered at both the shrines. The devotees never forget to offer prayer at mausoleum before them line-up at Ma Kalka Devi temple to seek her blessings. This place can be considered as a perfect example of peace, love and harmony. The temple and the mausoleum have been constructed side by side. Nobody have any grudge over this. Whenever anybody wants, he/she worship in this temple as well as mausoleum. According to locals, the priest of Kalka Devi temple comes from Dalit background. King Jaswant Rao, who got the temple constructed, made it mandatory that the priest of the temple would only be a Dalit, which is another perfect example of social equality. At a time when our countrymen are debating if a temple and a mosque can coexist in Ayodhya, one only needs to look towards the 195-year-old site, for inspiration - where religious structures belonging to both communities have coexisted in peace and harmony.

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