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Embracing the Other in Religions

'Embracing the other in religions' is a positive response to the phenomenon of diversity in religious traditions in the society. It is a process towards harmonious and peaceful living. It invites believers to broaden their faith to a circle of all faiths. The humans are by nature social beings. The social character requires one necessarily to get related to the religious other. The path to the divine is realistically not vertical, but horizontal. In other words, the sisterly, brotherly and friendly state of relatedness with other human beings, as implied in embracing the other in religions, is the culmination of the spiritual search of the humans. This establishes the relevance of religion and religious endeavour in social life, as well.

The relation of one religion to the other has to be unquestionably positive and it can in no way afford to be negative. An 'exclusive' understanding of one's religion is totally anti-social and depressing. An 'inclusive' perspective of the religious other is definitely better, but still is self-centred. 'Pluralism' is creditable by way of its broad-vision of situating all traditions in their due place, but advocates an existence that is unrelated to the other, like parallel lines. 'Relativism' promotes a disconnected and scattered position in life. Besides, 'tolerating the other' is negative and is highly insulting to the dignity of the other. Having 'peaceful coexistence with the other' seems to be a passive predicament, like that of the cemetery. A believer has to go beyond all these responses, because they are either negative or incomplete.

Having 'good will towards the other' is basic to a positive step towards the other in religions. Considering him or her 'on equal footing' is an extension of the good will. 'Respecting the other' would mean holding him or her in esteem. 'Interacting' with the religious other is a creative way of getting related with him or her. 'Accepting the other' is engaging with him or her whole-heartedly and learning from him or her. 'Cooperating or collaborating with the other' is a shared commitment to the common concerns of the society. Being in 'harmony with the other' would mean holding a relationship of 'fellowship' with the religious other, through diverse pro-active processes. 'Embracing the other in religions' would imply celebrating all these positive sentiments across the horizons of faith-perceptions and making faith or religion worth the while.

Key Words: Religion, faith, other, embracing, harmony, inclusive, sharing, fellowship

INTRODUCTION

Can any human being have a direct access to the divine? Are the gods and goddesses conceived, idolized and adored by the humans in diverse traditions of civilizations the infallible locus of the divine embodiment? In spite of the due relevance of the symbolic representations of the divine in religions, are religious systems capable of providing human beings with a short cut to the eternal God proper? I do not think so. On levelheaded terms, the vertical relation to the divine makes real sense in the context of the horizontal relations. The genuine abode of the divine is the creation and the living beings in a general way and human beings in a particular way. Human beings are the living temples of God. Recognizing God in other human beings and beings is the irrefutable proof for staying tuned to the divine. It is in this context that ‘embracing the other in religions’ speaks volumes of the spiritually elevating divine stories, validly so.

1. KEY CONCEPTS

1.1. Embracing

‘Embracing’¹ would mean ‘holding someone closely in one’s arms, especially as a sign of affection’. It also implies ‘accepting a belief, theory or change willingly and enthusiastically’. Welcoming whole-heartedly, taking to one’s heart, receiving with open arms, adopting a different way, etc are some of the connotations of this meaning. It is an act of eager clasp of something that was foreign to the one who performs the act. In brief, embracing refers to a positive, affirming and outgoing disposition.

1.2. Other

‘Other’² implies many shades of meaning, such as ‘person or people aside oneself’, ‘person different from the one implied or specified’, ‘the remaining one of the several’, ‘of a different character or quality’, ‘opposite or contrary to oneself’, ‘a different person’, ‘an additional person’, ‘another person’, etc. Difference from oneself is the definitive character of the other.

1.3. Religion

‘Religion’, deriving from the Latin root, ‘religare’³, means ‘to tie, to fasten, to bind, to hold together and to re-connect’. It implies ‘reverence for the sacred’. It refers to the bond with God or spiritual beings and with the human and the natural worlds. As an organized collection of beliefs, cultural systems and world views, it is oriented to provide the humans with a meaning in life. Religion may involve dogmas, rituals, pilgrimages, fasts, etc, as well.

There are various systems of sacred histories, symbols and narratives. An ethical and moral life style is the practical utility of religion. The word ‘religion’ is used interchangeably with ‘faith’⁴ at times, though faith is the core reality of conviction and confidence that can exist even outside the confines of any religious system. The engagement with the divine could be open-ended and of free-style, too.

1.4. Other in Religions

‘Other in religions’⁵ clearly refers to the plurality of religious perceptions, affiliations and persuasions. Anthropologists opine that there are thousands of major and minor religions in the world, though the prominent ones are around a dozen only. Peoples and civilizations inherit a certain religious tradition, acquire a system of religious belief and practice of their choice or opt for a faith or an ideology of their heart’s content in a free-style manner.

Besides, the same religious following admits various streams and strands. If so, the immense plurality of religious backgrounds and tastes cannot be ruled out for obvious reasons. Now, the point in question is how a person of one religious point of view perceives a person of another believer. Another believer is slightly a different person and therefore is ‘the other’. Has the other in religions to be hated or kept at a distance? If not, how could ‘embracing the other in religions’ be a reality? The answer to these questions will decide the destiny of the humanity, especially for times ahead of us.

2. BEYOND NEGATIVE AND PARTIAL PERSPECTIVES

2.1. Exclusivism

Exclusivism⁶ is the theory or policy of excluding a person or a collection of persons from a place, group or privilege. Religious exclusivism⁷ is the belief or doctrine that only one particular religion or belief system is true. Accordingly, one believes in one’s religion as a channel of salvation and discards other belief systems as destined to perdition. Strict monotheism, concept of ‘chosen race’ and restricted entry to heaven, etc are a few of the features of exclusive theories in Abrahamic religions, especially of earlier times.

Exclusive understanding of religion stresses on the uniqueness of one’s icon of divinity and the finality of the scripture that is a record of his teachings. An exclusivist faith tends to justify religious wars, forced conversions, persecution of religious minorities and bans against inter-religious fellowship and marriage. A modified form of exclusivism accommodates other faiths as legitimate to some degree and respects them. But, the position of centrality of one’s faith does not allow the adherents to part with the above tendencies. This is true about all believers.

Since any claim to truth by nature is exclusive, some degree of exclusiveness is inevitable. All the same, the moderate view of religion provides for some scope for dialogue with other religionists. Believers of all religious traditions have to go beyond the respective schools of thought and attempt to weigh the logic of one’s own tradition as the only one. Though embracing the religious other is a far-flung dream, getting out of the psychological ghetto of exclusive mindset will certainly serve the first step towards it. One needs to get freed of this enslaving mindset in order to recognize other beliefs.

2.2. Inclusivism

Inclusivism⁸ is a view that recognizes the presence of other religious traditions. It also admits that God is present in other religions. At the same time, it avows the essential legitimacy of the tradition one is affiliated to. It proceeds to include other religious traditions in such a way that the efficacy of one’s own tradition spills over that of others in an anonymous way. In other words, one’s

icon of faith is the source of salvation not only for oneself, but also for others, though they are not aware of the same. Such a point of view was mooted by Karl Rahner, a theologian of Roman Catholic origin.

The beauty of this position is that it does not involve conversion to the faith of the other. It is not mandatory for one to know the religious tenets or scriptures of the other tradition. Change of allegiance is not required at all. But, the benefits of salvation from the other are assured. The dynamics of such a theory is that 'God, as per my tradition, reaches out to every human being in his or her own personal religious history'⁹. People experience the grace of the same God one knows, regardless of the religion they belong to.

Besides, the universal understanding of one's divine icon and the faith tradition is a matter of credit. God reaches out to all humanity and he makes it through ways known to him alone. Because of such an outlook, one considers other religious traditions within the design of God and as lawful. This sympathetic approach to religions tends to ignore ungodly elements within religions. The principle applied here appears to be 'knowledge of the truth is an occasion for liberation'¹⁰. The voluntary submission to God is the saving factor.

All the same, inclusivism is, in a way, arrogantly exclusivist from the perspective of other religions. To say that others are saved by the merit of the faith I am affiliated to is in fact an insult to other faiths. Here, other believers are treated as false. But, it is as if my neighbour actually lives by my money, though he or she earns his livelihood and lives by it. Such a claim is illogical and superfluous. No doubt, in spite of the positive attitudes in an inclusivist view point, one has to go a long way towards accepting the religious other as he or she is.

2.3. Pluralism

Pluralism¹¹ holds the view that all the religions of the world are equally true and valid. John Hick placed this view forward. Accordingly, all religions reveal the truth about God, man, world and salvation. Bhagavadgita support this view thus, 'by whatsoever way men worship me, even so do I accept them; for, in all ways, O Partha, men walk in my path'¹². The popular understanding too falls in line with this thinking 'all religions lead to the same God and all paths lead to heaven'.

Pluralists argue that God is not at the centre and at any one religion. Religions are fundamentally same and are only superficially different. Therefore, no one religion is the one and only way of salvation. There are several religions. Pluralism rules out the finality of religions and affirms the validity of all religions. Words like absolute, unique, only and final are meaningless for pluralists. Pluralism also paves the way for the evolutionary understanding of religions, by way of higher forms following the lower forms.

Pluralism has an inbuilt capacity for promoting tolerance among the religionists. Since absolute statements are downgraded, the legitimacy of all religions gets instated. The monopoly over truth is pluralized. Nevertheless, the core characteristic of truth, which excludes everything else contrary to it, smacks of stating that 'all religions are untrue'. Besides, it has a danger of being self-dependent and unrelated to the other. Therefore, though pluralism opens up the religious world for all, it seems to be

exclusive in certain ways. No wonder, embracing the religious other is still much ahead of being pluralistic.

2.4. Relativism

Relativism¹³, obviously, is a concept that argues for the relative or subjective value of all that life has, especially truth. It is a principle that rules out the possibility of any knowledge, truth or morality existing as absolute. It affirms that they exist only in relation to culture, society or historical context. It underscores the differences in perceptions and opinions. Ethics applies only to a limited context. Truth all the more is relative, as per the linguistic and cultural contexts.

Relativism holds all points of view as equally valid and no system of truth as more valid than the other. Since no objective standard or norm of truth is acceptable, it refutes God as absolute truth. Accordingly, the individual reserves the right to philosophical, religious, political, social and moral positions. No wonder, this pervasive and permissive phenomenon of modern times seems to do away with the very idea of right and wrong. ‘Your truth and my truth’, ‘there cannot be anything that is mandatory for all’, etc are the slogans of relativism.

The negative implications of relativism are numerous. The entire society is affected by this perspective. Media could become loose as well as law, indecisive. The sense of sin seems to disappear. All types of absolutism are denied as old-fashioned and untenable. Such a predicament is illogical, because society slips into lawlessness and chaos. If everyone does what is right in his or her own eyes and if each one becomes the custodian of himself or herself, social life will be impossible. As a matter of fact, society cannot do away with certain common foundation of truth and absolutes, lest society be fragmented and shattered.

Relativism can be individual or societal. When a certain community, country or society holds the theory of relativism, considering some things right or wrong could be granted as legitimate. For instance, driving on the left or right side of the road, principles of child rearing, burial practices, wedding ceremonies, etc are ways of cultural setting. Similarly, when individuals reserve the right to be relativists, one could get irritated by a sound while another wouldn’t and one would amass immense wealth while another would be satisfied with a modest income.

Nonetheless, if everything is relative to the individual and no absolute truth is accepted, there would be no common ground for the humans. Besides, if there is no absolute truth, there can be enormous absolute truths, that too, entirely of different kinds. Though relativism safeguards the freedom of the individual or individual communities, it can make the society very badly individualistic, self-centred, scattered and chaotic. Relativism has absolutely no scope of embracing the religious other. Evidently, one requires travelling much beyond, in view of getting related to the other.

2.5. Tolerating the Other

The concept of tolerance emerged in the second decade of the twentieth century as against the intolerant practice of ‘shuddhi’¹⁴, which was the method of proselytizing pursued by reformist Hindus

of the Arya Samaj. The idea served balancing the politics of caste then. Later, the word was used for representing the ideology of contrasting the proselytizing approach of religions. Today, tolerance is very often understood to be an indirect advocate of religious freedom and the spirit of Indian secularism.

Toleration would mean the capacity to endure something,¹⁵ i.e., physical resistance, hardship or pain. It is the power of invulnerability as regards surviving odds. It is the ability of an organism to withstand or handle a difficult environmental condition. It is the willingness to tolerate the existence of opinions or behaviour that one dislikes or disagrees with. Tolerance is a demand of certain situations that even if one disagrees on something, one has to put on show tolerance. It is the capacity to endure continued subjection to something. It also means refraining from adverse reaction to anything, even to corruption.

Tolerance is an immune response to any foreign substance. It demands going beyond prejudice. It is a liberal mindset that paves the way for broad-mindedness and open-mindedness. It is a fair and permissive attitude towards those whose religion, nationality, etc., differ from one's own. It is a power to bear with the opinions and practices of others. It is the ability to recognize and respect the beliefs and practice of others, as well. In spite of laying a foundation for certain positive perspectives, tolerance as such is a negative value and highly falls short of an affirmative and creative approach to the other in religions.

2.6. Peaceful Coexistence with the Other

Peaceful coexistence¹⁶ was a theory that was developed and applied by the Soviet Union. This was an attempt to combat the cold war with regard to the foreign policy of Marx and Lenin. This was later adopted by the 'socialist states' of the Soviet union for coexisting peacefully with the capitalist states. This was a very powerful antidote to the disagreement and antipathy between communism and capitalism. This theory established better relations between the Soviet Union and the western world, particularly between the US and NATO countries and the nations of the Warsaw pact.

The Panchsheel Treaty¹⁷ (Five Principles) between China and India, signed in Peking in 1954, enunciates the basic etiquette for governing relations between the respective states and the same contribute to peacefully coexisting with each other. They are 'mutual respect for each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty, mutual non-aggression, mutual non-interference in each other's internal affairs, equality and cooperation for mutual benefit and peaceful coexistence'.

Peaceful co-existence, observably, means existing side by side without aggressing upon each other. Peace here stands for, first and foremost, not violating each other. This point could be articulated clearly by the Jain philosophy of 'live and let live'¹⁸. It affirms honouring the sacred area of individuals and institutions. While abstaining from meddling with the other, it also prepares the way for collaboration between the parties concerned. However, an active engagement with the other as in embracing the other is still quite a distance ahead.

3. TOWARDS POSITIVE AND CREATIVE PERSPECTIVES

3.1. Good Will Towards the Other

Good will¹⁹ is a friendly disposition. Goodness is its core spirit. It is a positive temperament. It is a helpful and cooperative attitude. Benevolence, empathy, kind-heartedness and kindness are contained in its inner make up. It is an attitude of willingness, interest, positive quality and good relationship. It is a cheerful compliance and kind regard also.

Faith is a mindset of superior quality. Good will is its core worth. Being positive in mind and heart, in oneself and towards others is essential to its relevance. That would amount to state that a believer has necessarily to have a friendly temper in relation to another believer. An attitude of joining hands with the other in favour of him or her is its expression. Noble, kind and soft sentiments for the co-believer is indeed the test of one's faith. The state of happy, homely and regardful way of thinking will enable the believer to appreciate and value the great values inherent in the tradition of the religious other.

3.2. On Equal Footing with the Other

Equal footing²⁰ is the principle that assures social equality. It argues for same status to all individuals or communities in a given society or institution. All individuals and communities have equal rights before law. Accordingly, all have equal access to freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, right to property, right to social goods and services, right to voting, right to security, etc. Equality of opportunities, obligations, health facilities, freedom from discrimination, and the like, furthers this equal footing in life. Social equality also necessitates immunity from discrimination on the basis of sex, gender, race, age, sexual orientation, origin, caste, class, income, property, language, religion, convictions, opinions, health or disability of any sort.

All religious traditions, irrespective of the magnitude in their philosophy, history and ethical values, have a right to exist. Immunity from discrimination, in spite of its strength as majority or minority, is an inviolable fundamental right, bound by justice. All religious communities have a duty to protect each other. The religious community that commands strength by number and social values has a supplementary responsibility to take care of the smaller religious entities. As per the Constitution of India, equal opportunities are allotted to all religious traditions to practice, propagate and grow. In this context, the principle of equal footing is to be practiced by all believers. Social equality is the groundwork for building mutuality among believers of diverse traditions.

3.3. Respecting the Other

Respect²¹ is a positive feeling of esteem for a person or another entity. It could be an individual, a nation or a religion. It is a specific feeling of regard for the actual qualities of the one respected. Respect can be both given and/or received. Depending on an individual's cultural frame of mind, respect can be earned. Respect is built over a considerable span of time. Continued caring is required in interactions in order to maintain or increase feelings of respect among individuals.

A sense of esteem for the other believer is fundamental to a creative way of existing side by side. One should have a sense of admiration for at least the core values of the other's religious tradition. Regardful way of holding the other is what is required by respecting the other. Respect is a positive

value. Considering the other in a reverential frame of mind would definitely lead one to treating the other believer and his or her faith important and valuable. Respecting the faith values of the religious other is an occasion for learning from the other and thus enriching oneself.

3.4. Interacting with the Other

Interaction²² is a two-way action. It is a reciprocal action between two or more entities. It occurs as two or more persons or objects have an influence or effect upon one another. Interaction makes the concerned parties stay connected to each other. It is a relational move towards life. As an exercise of meeting the other face-to-face, it is a process of deep socialization. Interaction is a non-dominating style of life. It is a relational approach to life. It is an ongoing endeavour and is oriented to peace among religions, nations and cultures.

When interaction involves the other in words, it is ‘dialogue’²³. The word ‘dialogue’ means ‘converse’ or ‘speak’ and ‘across’, ‘with’, ‘through’, ‘between’, ‘among’, etc., respectively. It is conversation between two or more. It is an exchange of ideas, views and experiences. It is an interaction on equal footing. Dialogue involves both speaking and listening. One-sided speaking is can only be a monologue. Dialogue is a two-way communication between the concerned parties.

Interaction or dialogue necessitates one to open up to the other. It is a positive attitude of goodwill towards the other. It involves learning from the other, respecting, loving, serving and promoting the other. It is a combination of give and take; it is both question and answer, in a single unit. Interaction or dialogue would mean mutual relations, mutual conversion and mutual transformation. It is a co-journey of life, a joint pilgrimage to God. It is a related existence. It would mean having a ‘shared’ language, a shared ideology, a shared culture, a shared commitment, a shared faith, a shared conviction and a shared spirituality. It would mean ‘being present to the other’, being a mirror to the other. It is a means to purify, enrich and transform the other. It would imply ‘walking and working together’ in life.

Interaction or dialogue is a ‘democratic’ perception of life. It implies a brotherly-sisterly and friendly style of life. It is a humble way of life, in the sense that it refrains from all sorts of encroachment of the religious other. It maintains an aesthetic view of life, by seeing beauty in diversity. It combines singularity and mutuality and ensures enrichment and an integrated growth. Interaction or dialogue ends in religious harmony and harmony begins with religious dialogue. Both are complementary. Interaction is an ‘inclusive, interactive, participatory, collaborative, cooperative, constructive and positive process of life’, as regards the other in religions.

3.5. Accepting the Other

Accepting²⁴ would mean ‘welcoming’ something. It denotes receiving with gladness or approval. It involves giving consent. It means believing or recognizing the validity of something. It could mean obtaining and acquiring, too. Giving credit to, putting confidence in, being convinced of and having faith in are some variations of the notion. Accepting implies ‘counting on, replying on, depending on, trusting, etc. It is an affirmative response. Admitting, regarding favourably and agreeing to take up a duty or responsibility are the nuances of the word, as well.

The above meanings are to be applied to the religious other. Every believer has to recognize the validity of the religious path of the other. He or she needs to maintain a welcoming attitude to other believers. He or she has to celebrate the presence of the other with an inner cheerfulness. This disposition has to be extended to the values, beliefs and worldviews of the other tradition of faith. He or she has to place trust in the other and in the positive elements of his or her belief system. Accepting the other in religions would mean a voluntary and favourable temperament to the persons who profess a different faith.

3.6. Cooperation with the Other

Cooperation²⁵ or collaboration is the process of individuals or groups acting or working together. It is oriented to their common or mutual benefit. There is no sense of competition between them. Fairness is a basic requirement for cooperation. Altruistic partnerships, good of the society or the institution, personal status, reputation, etc are some of the objectives of cooperation. Having shared goals is essential for working with the other. Knowledge-sharing, resources-pooling, etc are a few instances of the same. Collaboration is a decentralized way of working. It calls for a larger outlook to life and a superior form of leadership. It implies working together by partners who are more or less of equal footing.

Collaboration with the religious other implies a team work with him or her. Cooperation with him or her is acting together for a common cause. Finding oneself on the same platform is indispensable for acting together. The common ground with believers of other faith could be mutual interest or some social cause. Cooperation among believers is a great opportunity for gauging the worth of the believers in the process. The partnership of the believers is like being a mirror to each other, in which either of them could check the spiritual and moral fitness. Addressing social problems together is in fact living the faith in practice. Having a shared vision and mission in life is the realistic approach to faith and all faiths. Cooperation with the religious other is the practical form of embracing the other in religions.

3.7. Harmony with the Other

The word ‘harmony’²⁶ means integration, co-ordination, unity, balance, etc. The Hindi synonym for the word harmony is ‘samanvay’²⁷ and it has two parts, ‘anvay’ and ‘sam’. ‘Anvay’ means ‘agreement, co-ordination’, etc. and ‘sam’ means ‘on equal footing’ or ‘equally’ and ‘totally’. Samanvay implies a five ‘S’ formula: sadbhaav (good will), sambhaav (equal footing), sammaan (respect), sehyog (co-operation) and samanvay (harmony). All the meanings of harmony together compose a complete perspective of life.

The word ‘harmony’ is grounded in the world of music. It is the ‘pleasing effect’ that emerges from a group of musical sounds as they are sounded all together. A single note cannot produce harmony. The concord among many notes does. Solo players conduct themselves in such a way in an orchestra that they make a single musical effect and as a result create fine and sublime sentiments. It is the co-ordination of melody and rhythm. Singing, playing and dancing present a complete music and present a model for perfect harmony.

In the larger setting, harmony is a ‘pleasant blend of diverse elements of life in a single whole’. It is an agreement between perceptions, ideas, opinions, feelings, attitudes and actions. It is an arrangement of interests and tastes, colours and shapes, traditions and practices, streams and strands, etc. It is a sense of order in the entire universe. It is the logic of proportion. It is an album of related things that agree with each other. It is a variety of parts that co-operate or work together for a common purpose and with mutual benefit. The different parts function with an equality of importance and a unity of purpose.

Harmony of faiths contains the best of sentiments that do complete justice to the divine and the human realms. Being in harmony with other faiths and their adherents is the ultimate utility and relevance of one’s own faith. In a state of harmony of faiths all faith traditions have their due space and are secure, in the sense all faiths have. The state of harmony of faiths is in fact the celebration of differences.

3.8. Embracing the Other

‘Embracing the other in religions’²⁸ is a positive process of engaging with the religious other. It is a creative way of including the other believer into one’s circle of being. It is an affectionate style of remaining related with the other and his or her faith. It involves accepting the perception of the other as regards life, ideas, faith, theories and practices as valid. The attitude of an open heart and mind is the core of the engagement with the other. The spirit of enthusiasm and willingness to bridge the gap between the alien faith of the other and the familiar faith of one’s self is the transforming power of the meeting with the religious other.

Embracing the other in religions is a process that liberates the partners in question unto a mutual conversion. The ‘I’s are transformed into a single ‘we’. The partners are able to see themselves in each other, as if in a mirror. They start ‘sharing with’ and ‘sharing in’ the faith perspective of the other as well as learning from each other. As they walk together as fellow pilgrims, they realize that they are making a joint pilgrimage to the same divine power. ‘Embracing the other in religions’ is the way forward for believers of all religious traditions, especially in the twenty-first century, truly so.

CONCLUSION

Diversity of religious traditions is one of the most fundamental realities in the human society. ‘Situating one’s self amidst the above ocean of diversity’ is the challenging task before every individual. Establishing balance and harmony between many-in-relation-to one and one-in-relation-to many is a lifelong process of growing up in faith. That would amount to state that one’s faith has to broaden towards a circle of all faiths. Only then, the social character can be justified. If God is really God, he, she or it does not require any praise or veneration. What is done to human beings, especially the religious other, is equal to what is done to God.

Therefore, excluding the other in religions would mean excluding God from one’s life. Including the other smacks of a condescending spirit and denotes seeking oneself while relating to God. To be pluralistic with others would mean having almost a parallel existence with God. To be relativistic to

the other would mean I follow my way and let God mind his business. Tolerating the other would signify a sense of discomfort and helplessness with regard to the presence of God. Peacefully coexisting with the other would mean allowing God to exist by one's side, without any considerable relation.

Having good will, having respect for and accepting the other would mean to recognize God as he, she or it is. Interacting with the other on equal footing and cooperating with the other would mean being co-creator with God in living the life gifted by God. Being in harmony with the other would mean being in harmony and union with God. Embracing the other in religions would imply a positive and creative process that leads to harmonious and peaceful living. This state of harmony gives the perfect testimony of the divine and social character, in which human beings are created. No wonder, this state will furnish a realization that the 'other' in religions is not really 'other', but is 'an extension of my own divine-human self as well as belongs to my own world of faith, which is social and multi-faceted in character. 'Embracing the other in religions' establishes the relevance of religion and the ultimate meaning of human life, as well.

END NOTES

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