



Interfaith Youth Summit

21st-25th June 2011, Khandala

With the onset of showers, found a large number of young participants within the country representing diverse faith backgrounds giving out solidarity concerns towards the diabolic state of socio-political issues existing in the country. They brought themselves together towards the need of a secular and pluralistic society based on understanding for a better tomorrow rather than treating it as a claim of an acceptance and agreement. A young brigade of 45 students were chosen among many others to shoulder the responsibility of bringing out a sense of transparency within the realms of their faith communities, which would challenge stereotypical mindsets that create differences among individual boundaries.

Day 1: 21st June 2011

The summit started with warm welcome greeting by **Fr. Vineeth Koshy**, who appreciated the initiative of students, for their eagerness to build a better constructive society. He welcomed and introduced the panellists, and moderated the panel acknowledging their role performed by them in building a better humanity. He spoke about the panel members with their diverse backgrounds and experiences towards influencing the young ignited minds for creating a necessity of reasoning for a dialogue, questioning as to who and what decides the patterns of such reasoning. Fr. Koshy considers each one of us as ambassadors of the very faith they represented, to their respective subjects. The panellists reflected the desire of the concept of living together is possible for the pluralistic faiths supported by culture and language, giving out the internal structure of a fruitful harmony envisioned by common beings. The expertise scholars expressed the need of such more platforms, giving out an opportunity that would open up minds sets played by rigid fundamental and extremists existing in the complex social fabric of India.

The jerseys or labels of identities remind us giving unworthy signals which don't remain as an investing factor for a beautiful rhythm meant to be kept for an objective. The summit becomes an encouraging benchmark in formulating the approach of objectives.

One of the panel members, **Rev. Dr. Victor Golapalli** gave out short greetings to students for their growth and development of the training involving them. He gave the pulse of understanding the very belongingness required for the society.

Bishop H G Geevargese Coorilos gave out the need and essentiality of the challenging dialogue for aggregated faiths, feeling the heat of the communal tensions within the state. He urges the young minds to listen to the desire of being a role model within their community, in glorifying GOD towards the fellowship and togetherness of working with other faiths. He emphasised religion to be a platform for unifying different bodies of faith under one umbrella, without being a disruption for the essence of one's own teachings of their faith. He asked us to sow seeds of introspection within ourselves, which can become a harvest for an individual and group serving the common goal of the society in a feasible and accessible manner.

Adv. Irfaan Ali shared the need for looking back at the history which was misinterpreted by certain actors who brought barriers towards the unified state of communal harmony. He steered the group away from unguided, uninterrupted and unrecognised truths, towards maintenance of social justice. He made the group question the gravity of the facts, given by ungodly misconceptions with the objective of exploiting the class, gender, caste, religion, language belonging to the identities for political mileage. He portrayed the ethical understanding of Tulsī Das and Kabir relevant for the present society, which can cater the individual's perspective.

Fr. Packium Samuel gave a broader outlook through certain examples sharing the same platform at which the reasons are either proclaimed or revealed. He kept straight forward questions towards the participants so as to introspect within themselves about the concept of GOD and urging the need to personalise with their understanding of the questions towards seeking answers. It makes further clear with the introspecting questions kept towards different faiths in relation to roots of the concept of GOD. The questions meant for introspection and broader spheres in GOD were-

- Have you really articulated your theology called GOD?
- How far have we reached in contextualising your GOD?

The sense of thinking of reflecting towards belongingness in one god as a source of light catering different faiths with 5 questions served before the youth-

- How do you place your scriptures among other scriptures?
- Where do you put your GOD in front of other gods?
- Is your saviour the only saviour? Where do you place your saviour among other saviours?
- Where do you put your place of worship among those of other communities?
- How do you see the perspective of kingdom of god with the other kingdoms of gods?

He questions for the need of risking our unique identity for the sake of marginalised or diminutive sections by creating a balance required in the present context of society.

Ms Divya Vinod requested the participants to write the following mentioned symbols of varied faiths other than their own faith on a small sticky chit, given to them each so as to be pasted on their chests. When asked about the reason of choosing that very faith some participants explained that choosing the symbol of Hinduism means a form of energy which is omnipresent and so is GOD. Another person spoke the need to choose this symbol reflects the first few letters of Hindi language which in some context reflects GOD. Another participant explained the reasoning of choosing Christianity as Jesus Christ is considered as a prophet in Islamic faith and is treated as a nearest and closest faith to Islam. The resource person gave the importance of learning to live together (LTLT) in a multi cultural diverse country like India rather than their own personalised mileage of supremacy. One of the participants argued that LTLT is important in order to minimise the differences which have been in existence amongst the persons of different faiths due to the division of society on numerous grounds in micro level as well as on the macro level. One another view seen by a participant on this context related LTLT as a tree where all the perspectives of different religions are the different branches with the trunk seen as interfaith perspective. In order to stand firm on any grounds it is necessary to make the trunk of the tree stronger so it could have the strength to hold the branches without falling by the weight of a monopolistic branch. It is definitely required in a diverse hungry country like India. A view by a participant differed saying that religion is something personal while social life and interaction have nothing to do with the religion. According to that person interfaith plays an important role in respecting and understanding's another's religion, and also plays a vital role in developing or shaping an individual's life and interests.

The resource person had divided the participants among teams to ponder over the case study given to them each bringing out with a visible solution, its causes, effects and the boarder headline to each case study. She invited responses from the participants for a constructive structure of the case studies through the means of discussion.

How does it feel when you become a victim to some communal dispute? What is the basic meaning of loving each other irrespective of caste and creed? These were some of the questions that were cleared with the speaker's session. Her thoughts, words and actions reflected her perception of interfaith understanding. The session helped in making the participants think on the same level making it a lot more inter-active and interesting. No bias on communal basis or on gender grounds was one of the few things that she specified on. She gave an in-depth study on how we could be a proponent of religious and interfaith understanding. Not only did she specify on the positive aspects of interfaith but she also explained how most people need something amorphous to justify evil.

Various case studies were discussed so that we come up with practical solutions which would help us in knowing the negatives in the society and how we can stop it by using the concept of loving everyone else as human beings and not as individuals from different back grounds.

The first day of the interfaith journey dropped its curtain with participants introducing themselves and whereabouts of the place they come.

Day 2: 22nd June 2011

The day started with **interfaith prayer** on a cold Wednesday morning with representatives of different faiths coming together for a mass worship towards a secular GOD, bringing out the essence of a common belongingness and oneness from the presence of the various faith practices.

Mr. Anil Tharayath gave the heat of varied issues concerning towards the need and recognition of a social movement, realization to the cause of understanding the empowerment for the criteria of social justice meant for the biased marginalized and deprived diminutive sections of the society. He quoted the examples of chipko movement, against deforestation, started during the 19th century emphasizing the need for another movement in the present scenario. He asks the need to fill the deficit with structural initiatives by the youths who are the young eager minds of tomorrow's reasons. He presents the likes of Arundhati roy and Binayek Sen who criticize the ignorance and selfishness roles played by the state towards the marginalised and diminutive sectors of the society. He sketches the key role performed the corporate world that have started controlling the functional roots of the nation as a whole both internally and externally. He pointed out that these foriegn financial institutions outside are making waves of controlling the sectors of the economy through the means of development, by displacing people for the sake of growth of the country at a macro level. He pointed out the extract of the corporate loot, giving the much boarder periscope, of how the functioning of the state scans out the concerns and necessities of basic amenities required by the people. This portray of the toiling labour produced by working class and raising the adherence of voice of the people regardless of their caste, class, religion etc which reflects their identity, towards the cause of suffering meant to be taken in long run with injustices and compromise. His talk spoke about the massive wealth of the state, the natural resources, where habitual natives residing for centuries being uprooted and plundered by the irrational corporate world and also the wrath of the nuclear power reactors located in earthquake zone area which clearly violates the ecological norms.

The important components of social movement are

- Ideology
- Leadership
- Collective mobilisation
- Critique pattern of development

The talk highlighted the urging need of dialogue at different stanzas so as to bring harmony and peace towards the suffering within the grassroots of the societal structure, which shouldn't be swept away with unequal justice or biased mileage of certain groups holding the monopoly of the sectors. This result gives out the consequences of mutiny for preservation of sacred objects or resources, holding a huge amount of sentimental value, towards the individual and the society. The utter need of striking out a balance between all ethnic groups and communities should be ignited from the terrain of social movement. Certain questions addressed towards the youth during the talk were

- What exactly do you mean “social movement”?
- How do we engage with “others”?
- How will you commoditise hunger, protest etc?

It takes a lot of struggle a more of a conviction to engage inconvenient notions with the untouchability residing among the factors of the society, which subordinates others in the name of class, caste, gender etc, so as to follow a neo-liberal society. It is important to address the structural inequality before we become others. The very movement of corporate world needed to be laid out properly in a constructive pattern of a feasible society meant for all. At the end it is required to be self critical on our self being.

Ms Divya Vinod took her second session which was all about how we as participants could take the first step towards strong interfaith and spreading peace among the human race without any geographical boundaries. A shrine of different faiths could truly be the best way of spreading the word of love. Just as a shrine was built at Chang La Pass in Ladakh out of fear of death, we made an effort to build a shrine in the premises where this meet was held to save humanity. This added in more zest in the minds of the participants and also a sense of oneness which helped them penetrate deep inside their heart the need for strong fellowship among humankind.

The second day of the interfaith journey finished with a cultural programme by participants performing with their individual talents at their best, giving out the vibrancy of multi diverse culture we are hidden with as a country.

Day 3: 23rd June 2011

With the nights creeping with the slight dropping temperature, the day shone up with a bright sunny morning. The day started with a morning interfaith prayer with participants with faiths glorifying the mighty omnipresent GOD.

Dr. George Zachariah presented an overall cover page which wraps up the ecological concerns and the entire policy regarding approaches towards the climatic change affecting the society. He brings out the effective need for an active action meant to be played out before it is too late towards the consequences.

Why Interfaith Approach to Climate Change?

Members of the Inter-faith community in India, express our concern for the proper stewardship of God's creation. It is from our faith perspective that we approach environmental and justice issues. We express our concern that human irresponsibility is contributing to accelerating global climate change, producing negative impact on ecological balance. Our primary concern is to protect the value of life, which is a manifestation of God's creative process on Earth.

Dr. Zachariah presented a short talk on the structural components of religion. He defined religion to be divided into two components

- Ideology
- Faith

Ideology is regarded as communal, when the term religion is seen on the grounds of ideology. Whereas religion when seen through the lens of faith, it gives us an understanding of an opportunity to think whether I should continue in a particular religion and help sincerely in the religious life. What is important is to reinterpret the scriptures in the present context, so as to look into creating a new community, which would even be required at the cost of our religious identity. It is important to reclaim our religion before it is mishandled into unworthy approaches, which would make waves at a larger altitude. At the cost of our identity we should create a community for a better tomorrow, which can pioneer the roots of faiths. Even if the religion asks us to be inhuman in our lives, we should betray our religion for the sake of justice and peace in our well being. It is through deeper understanding of the religious texts and scriptures that a balance can be maintained by tacking the unjustified notions of interpretation. What is earnestly needed is to reinterpret our scriptures for a society meant for all where living together is possible regardless our identity. At the end, the religion is a noun which brings fruits of adjective and takes the shape of a verb for a harmonised society.

Dr. Dhurjati Mukherjee asked the young minds what they mean by religion in their own sphere of subjects. Dr. Mukherjee says that if you judiciously follow your work, shapes itself as a religion.

The interfaith journey for the third day ended with group discussions at which the participants were divided looking into the insights of five questions laid down by Fr. Packium Samuel on his session.

Day 4: 24th June 2011

The days getting younger with the passage of the journey, we approached the last full day sessions of speakers with a cultural night in the evening. The morning started with mist and hazy weather which didn't stopped the worship team to begin the interfaith worship by members together with one chord plugged by different strings.

The morning session was started by **Dr. Deepali Bhanot** on the topic gender equality. At first the participants were asked to list out the characteristics or qualities of men and women. Then, the titles given for the qualities of each were interchanged bringing out boarder conclusion of how the society decides the reasoning of socialism. It made us realise that we ourselves are the actors of socialised realm of the society. The resource person gave a distinctive clear difference of gender and sex. Gender refers to qualities whereas sex refers to be determined by birth. Our resource person made us understand the rate at which female foeticide have been increasing in a multiplying figures in various states of the country. It made further clearance of how the sex is being determined by birth. Gender is classified into characteristic s such as

- Habits

- Traditions
- Customs

In a man it's the masculine and feminine qualities that make him caring. It is due to patriarchal quotient that creates a sense of overbearing or supremacy of strength over which subordinates the other. It exploits the inhuman creature in men to burst with fury that makes the other quality or sex vulnerable and make itself dogma towards stigmatic practices or premium attached on it and treats it as a part of life. Sense of thinking which reflects these perceptions are the roadblocks or barriers for drawing out a tolerant and meaningful society.

Through gender issue it makes a broader approach that

We are

- socially learnt
- expecting association with adamant attitudes
- bounded by culture, time and space

Then, after a fruitful talk, the participants reflected themselves to atrocities or acts of violence committed in the society. The participants started highlighting the perpetrators, the target, the kind of violence and the causes which are prevalent and rotten the modules of a peaceful and respectable society.

Dr. Dhurjati Mukherjee brought out concerns of education in a more strategic manner which can bring out a better lifestyle of development and create influential role in social structure order. He pointed out

- breaking the hold of obscurantist and extremist elements over a section of a society
- further efforts to nurture and strengthen the forces of positivism and modernity
- bringing about a basic change in that the suspicious and prejudicial attitude of majority community towards the minority community being replaced by fellow feeling, compassion and love
- free mingling of children of various faiths, castes and professions in society
- highlighting the basic tenets that bind various faith and the articles which are common to various religions- NCCI/ Ramakrishna mission/ NCFI/ etc. could jointly work in this regard

The interfaith youth groups meant for discussion again pondered over the five questions given to them and to draw out a collective perceptions of the conclusion the very next day. This was followed by a cultural programme by participants as means of showing solidarity of a diverse nation in a unified body of interfaith.

With the sun getting down sharply, the interfaith participants gave out their presentation of their faith clearly out the misconception which others had held in their faith so as to bring everyone in the same platform in transforming the society in a collective effort.

Day 5: 25th June 2011

The end and closing of the interfaith journey neared to the junction, where the participants ensured their baggage's packed with their gearing stuff. The morning started with a regular interfaith worship at its sharp and precise timing.

Rev.Dr.Roger Gaikwad gave an account of all of how the religions of west Asia, India and the tribal / indigenous parameters engage in sustaining themselves in the present context of the world. The talk made us realise the need to figure out ourselves in proper understanding which can make an attempt to transform the society. The talk by the speaker gave a clear and clarity horizon in verifying the length and breadth of its evolution towards all the existing religion. This was done by comparative sketches of each parameter of religions residing in that particular structure, for example west Asia, India and indigenous groups, based on the creator, life, evolution, sin, forgiveness, eternal heaven and earth perceived. It can be classified into different categories such as:

1. Life
 - Religions from *west Asia* looks at life and considers it as a straight line with a beginning and end, whereas religions from *India* look life as a cycle. *The tribal/indigenous groups* look life as a dot.
2. Creator
 - Religions from *west Asia* have authors who is a personal GOD, whereas religions from *India* whose authors is a personal GOD, but there is an ultimate reality.
3. Evolution
 - Religions of west Asia are creation by God, whereas religions from India are created beings of GOD like incarnation or avatars.
4. Human being and GOD
 - In *west Asia*, religions perceive GOD and human as figures distinctive with each other, whereby religions from *India* look at humans being evolved from GOD with essential connections, which mean our soul is the spark of GOD.
5. Sin
 - Religions from *west Asia*, perceived human beings disobeyed with GOD in the beginning and then kept away with each other. These religions are self centred as called sin, which is not living in the essence of what GOD wants us to live.
 - In *India* sin is treated as ignorance and greed, where true self is engaged and inner self is realisation, where we wrongly identify the body as a true self.
6. Forgiveness or God's grace
 - In *west Asia* religions referring to GOD's grace as turning to and obeying GOD, which is a solution for coming out of evil.

- In *India* the religions there take it as to know the self, the ultimate reality remains indiscernible and we are living on this world, where this reality is seen as a person.
- 7. Eternal heaven and earth
- Religions from *west Asia*, perceive eternal world as waiting for new heaven and new earth.
- in *India* religions look at eternal world as it is with ages, more like a cycle of attaining moksha

The speaker kept forward few questions before the youth who are being challenged by globalisation, which left the participants ponder on it for a while, such as:

- What grounds or basis are we thinking about the tomorrow?
- What and who am I? What is that sustains each one of us?

The interfaith dialogue process between youths of different faiths finally curtailed down, with the participants making all attempts to reach home, that a hope of take over from this summit would be fulfilled to its objective. The participants ensured their feedbacks so that the conduct and its approach can be well rehearsed.

For long, what I learnt from interfaith was that, it was just proving your religion right. But after the summit, the perception did not remain the same - it was all about the common factors that each religion shared, it was about love, peace and harmony.

Each session had something peculiar, either it was a thought provoking one or it would be a session which would help you groom yourself as an individual. A sense of togetherness always prevailed throughout the sessions, which helped us in thinking in a broader perspective. The essence of all the religions came out in its true colour which helped in better understanding. Something unique about the meet was well reflected by the theme of the meet --- **“Together towards tomorrow “**

By the reporting committee members, WHO initiated the formation of this report...

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