

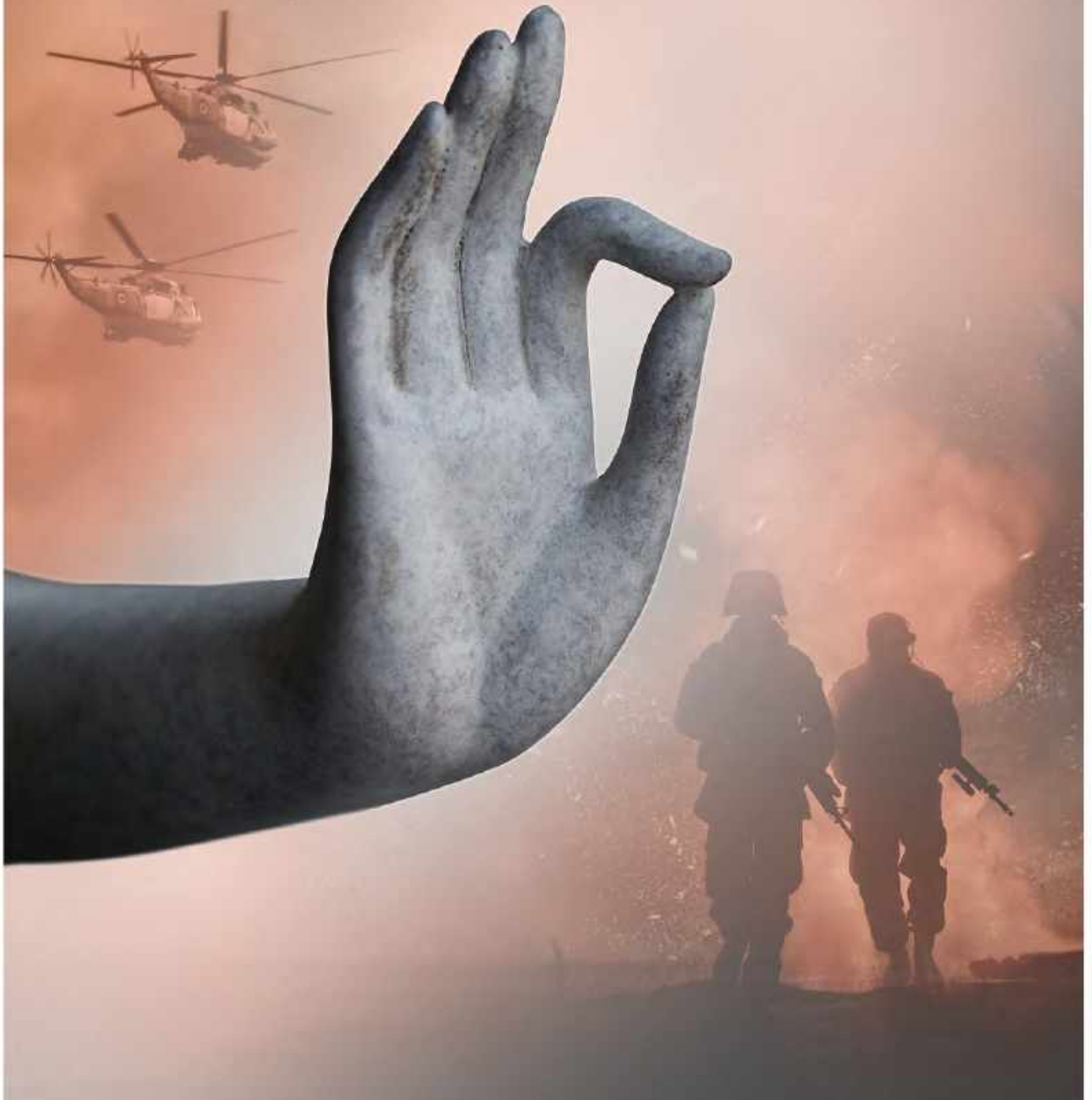
Bimonthly

Pax Lumina

Vol. 2 | No. 5 | September 2021

A Quest for Peace and Reconciliation

Religion & Peace



PaxLumina

A Quest for Peace and Reconciliation



Pax Lumina

A Quest for Peace and Reconciliation

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Promotion of Peace and Reconciliation

The Nodal Platform for Peace and
Reconciliation Network of JCSA aims at
fostering peace with a multi-pronged approach.



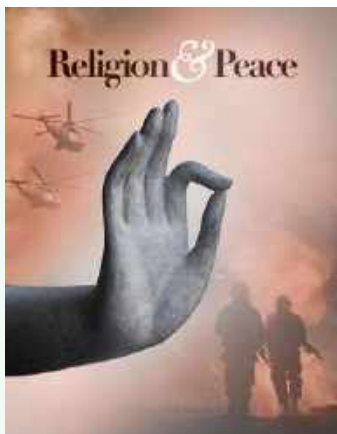
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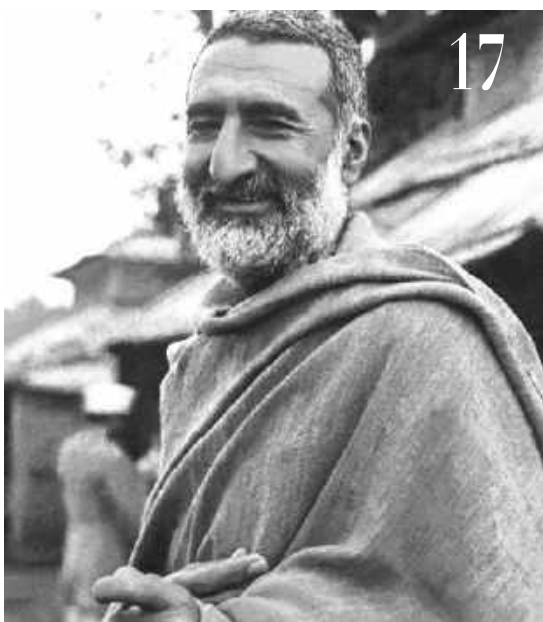
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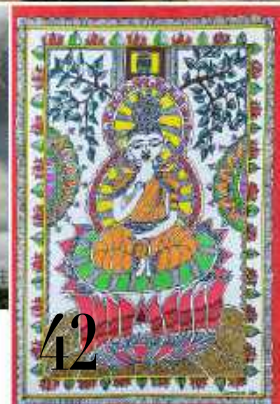
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Religion and Peace

All religious texts speak of peace as the ultimate goal of a human being. Peace is invoked during many religious rituals. Religious greetings generally comprise peace and its synonyms. Yet, many consider religion to be the cause of much violence in the world both in the past and the present. At the level of nations, most theocratic states inflict direct and indirect violence on their own citizens especially the most vulnerable, women, children and the other excluded. Look at Taliban which has come back to power in Afghanistan. They have shown themselves to be viscerally and sadistically intolerant of women and art. Can their guiding force be any kind of a religion?

The founders of all religions preached peace, love, justice, tolerance and a host of other desirable values. But when these ideals got concretised into institutions and organisations, they appear to have been short-changed for the need for preservation of the organizational identity and its expansion. Conquest for accumulation of wealth and power seem to have replaced the original ideals.

It may be argued that it is the unholy alliance of religion and politics that gives birth to this violent mutant which, in fact, is far from what true religion is supposed to be. Some schools of thought maintain that religion divorced of spirituality is the problem. In any case, these are important issues which need to be looked at carefully and impassionately. This issue of Pax Lumina asks some of these pressing questions and provides responses from those who have thought deeply about these issues, observed the unfolding of violence around us and, most importantly, looked for hope and peace amidst this encircling darkness.

Jacob Thomas
Editor



Afghanistan

Peace is not the product of terror or fear. Peace is not the silence of cemeteries. Peace is not the silent result of violent repression. Peace is dynamism. Peace is generosity. It is a right and it is a duty.

- Oscar Romero





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Pax Lumina 2(5) / 2021 / 08-11

What is Happening in Afghanistan ?

To answer this question, it might be useful to recall Barbara Tuchman's *The March of Folly: From Troy to Vietnam*. She has demonstrated that governments have often taken decisions contrary to their interest. That illustrates the law of unintended consequences which has been operative almost throughout history.

In the present case, the March of Folly began in 1979 when Zbigniew Brzezinski, President Jimmy Carter's National Security Adviser, sent in US Special Forces in July, 1979 to Afghanistan to foment revolts against the Communist government in Kabul.

The Afghan government became alarmed and sought military assistance from the Soviet Union. Russian leader Leonid Brezhnev, without consulting the Politburo, sent in forces.



America funded and armed the mujahideen that included Osama Bin Laden who inspired the 9/11 attack on the World Trade Centre in New York City and other sites. But Brzezinski got what he wanted. The folly of the Soviets in Afghanistan contributed to the weakening of the Soviet military and the liberation of Poland from Moscow's domination. However, Brzezinski, who was of Polish descent, did not foresee 9/11.

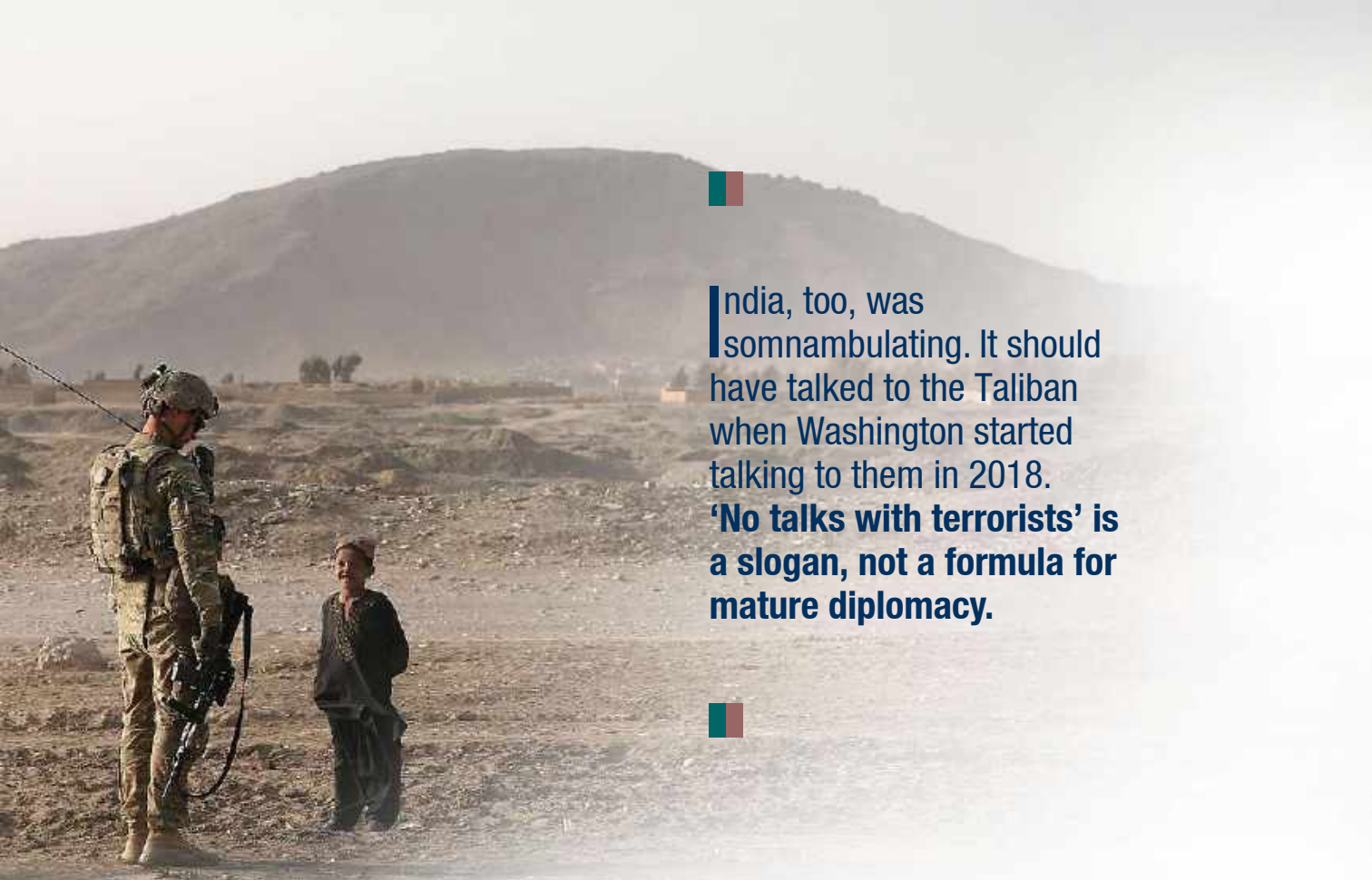
America lost interest in Afghanistan when the Taliban captured power in 1996. This outfit implemented a harsh version of the Sharia.

The next major actor in this sordid drama is President George Bush Jr. He and his National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice had not heeded the loud and clear signals of an impending attack on America. (<https://www.politico.eu/article/attacks-will-be-spectacular-cia-war-on-terror-bush-bin-laden/>)

The decision to withdraw the military was, in substance, a correct one. But the shambolic manner of execution could have been avoided.

Bush wanted to project himself as a formidable leader. So, he sent an ultimatum to the Taliban Government to surrender Osama bin Laden. Kabul was prepared to negotiate. But an adamant Bush, who argued that 9/11 had changed 'everything', started bombing the country on October 7, 2001.





India, too, was somnambulating. It should have talked to the Taliban when Washington started talking to them in 2018. **‘No talks with terrorists’ is a slogan, not a formula for mature diplomacy.**

Earlier, in late September, American and British Special Forces had entered Afghanistan giving support and arms to the Northern Alliance which was engaged in armed action to topple the Taliban. One week into the bombing, the Taliban offered to send Bin Laden to a third, ‘neutral’ country. Bush continued with his Global War on Terrorism. There was nothing left to bomb.

Americans occupied the country, with NATO playing the role of an ‘attendant lord’. The United Nations came in later. In April, 2002, Bush proclaimed a ‘Marshall Plan’ to do nation-building in Afghanistan. By 2009, \$38 billion had been spent.

In 2009, President Barack Obama wanted to leave Afghanistan but was compelled to send in 17,000 troops, adding to the 36,000 already there. He too recognised that the military engagement in Afghanistan was an albatross around America’s neck reminiscent of Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*.

President Donald Trump entered into talks with the Taliban in February, 2020, at Doha and agreed to the withdrawal of US and NATO forces against an undertaking by the Taliban that the territory of Afghanistan would not be permitted to be used for any terrorist attacks on the US and its allies. There was a clause for the release of prisoners, 1,000 by the Taliban and 5,000 by the Ashraf Ghani government. But the Ghani government was not a party to the agreement.

That Government and the Taliban were to start power-sharing talks once the prisoners were released. The release got postponed, the power-sharing talks started late, and stalled as the Ghani Government was split and the Taliban wanted a lion’s share of power.

In March, 2021, Secretary of State Antony Blinken wrote to President Ghani, in a deliberate breach of protocol, demanding that the power-sharing talks should be concluded fast as America was going ahead with its plans to pull out without waiting for any power-sharing arrangement.

By July 8, the troops' withdrawal was almost complete. Ghani continued to somnambulate. He was not alone. Biden too was somnambulating.

On August 12, there was a meeting of senior officials at 4 am in Washington as the Taliban captured provincial capitals one after the other.

On August 14, Biden was at Camp David for the start of a 10-day vacation. Instead, he spent much of the day on video conference calls with his top aides.

The decision to withdraw the military was, in substance, a correct one. But the shambolic manner of execution could have been avoided. The interested reader may like to see the New York Times z - <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/08/21/us/politics/biden-taliban-afghanistan-kabul.html>

India, too, was somnambulating. It should have talked to the Taliban when Washington started talking to them in 2018. 'No talks with terrorists' is a slogan, not a formula for mature diplomacy.



The right approach will be to encourage the formation of an inclusive government for which the Taliban has taken the initiative.



The Taliban may or may not have changed. Their rule from 1996 to 2001 was cruel. They have publicly promised to soften the Sharia and to permit the education and employment of women up to a point. The right approach will be to encourage the formation of an inclusive government for which the Taliban has taken the initiative. There are reports of the Northern Alliance planning an armed resistance in the Panjshir valley. The West is unlikely to lend military support.

Thousands of Afghans are fleeing or trying to flee. Washington has frozen Afghan funds to the tune of \$9.5 billion and the International Monetary Fund has disallowed Special Drawing Rights worth \$460 billion. The worsening availability of funds and the rise in the price of essentials might make the Taliban more unpopular than they are.

Looking at the big picture, there is a danger, not yet noticed by scholars.

After the Soviet Union fell, Russia and China got closer. After the West imposed sanctions on Russia following the 2014 annexation of Crimea, the two powers have virtually established an axis. Iran might join this axis primarily because Biden failed to lift the Trump-imposed sanctions. Where China goes, Pakistan follows. If the Taliban alone forms a government, Afghanistan too might join that axis.

Do look at the map. Such an axis will not be good for India or America. However, America is far away. New Delhi needs to make an urgent course correction.


(Ambassador KP Fabian served in the Indian Foreign Service between 1964 and 2000. He retired as Ambassador to Italy and Permanent Representative to the U.N. in Rome.)

Secularist Perspective Group, Pune

Radical Socialist Statement on Afghanistan A Double Tragedy

Pax Lumina 2(5) / 2021 / 12-16





In these 20 years, the US military and its puppet regimes have carried out massive bombings, drone attacks, **and brutal and indiscriminate ‘search and destroy’ missions against unknown insurgents and their families.**

We mourn with the Afghan people their double tragedy. The first tragedy is the US’s illegal and utterly unjustified military invasion 20 years ago. It helped prepare the ground for today’s tragedy, and the accession to power of the Islamofanatical Taliban. Condemnation of the latter must not mean any softening of the criticism of US and Western imperialism or in shedding tears at their departure from the country.

The single most important democratic advance in the second half of the 20th century was the end of colonial and imperialist rule even where this, unfortunately, resulted in indigenous dictatorships. In a world where peoples are constituted as belonging to separate and multiple States, the fundamental moral-political principle to uphold is respecting the freedom of people to overthrow their tyrants.

This is why it was the responsibility of Indians to overthrow British rule, of Indonesians the Dutch, of South Africans against apartheid, and so on. Calling for external help of all kinds, even military aid, was one thing; calling for external military liberation, no!

In the 1978 ‘Saur Revolution,’ a secular and reform-minded pro-Soviet ‘Communist’ party, the People’s Democratic Party of Afghanistan came to power but was bedevilled by internal armed faction-fighting and had no social base beyond Kabul.

The Soviet invasion in 1979 to support this government was morally unjustified and condemnable while politically disastrous, handing over as it did the mantle of ‘popular nationalist struggle’ against the foreign invader to a host of ethno-tribal Islamist groups including Al Qaeda and the Taliban.

The primary military aiders, equippers and trainers of these were the US, its British/French allies, along with Pakistan. The Soviets withdrew in 1989 with its factotum government collapsing three years later amidst a civil war waged by the various Islamists until the Taliban captured 90% of the territory and established its dominance in 1996.



The Taliban may or may not have learnt something from its past international isolation and avoid some forms of social and civic repression. But given its history and social programme of religious sectarianism, an anti-democratic attitude, and anti-women measures there is every reason to oppose it forthrightly and without equivocation.



In 2001 the US government deliberately refused to characterise the assault on the Twin Towers in New York and the Pentagon in Washington as an international crime against humanity. For that would have meant going after the criminals and their network only.

Instead, by declaring a 'Global War on Terror' and claiming that no distinction would be made between the guilt of the perpetrators and that of the governments of countries 'housing terrorists', the way was cleared for the US.

It could transform a conflict between itself and a non-state network into one against any number of countries in West and Central Asia. This was in keeping with its wider geopolitical ambitions of achieving global dominance.

In the new millennium, Afghanistan was the first of many to suffer such military assaults. The US foreign policy establishment had already identified China, Iran and Russia as

the ones to watch out for. They were aware that Afghanistan, apart from Pakistan, abuts Iran, China and the pro-Russia Central Asian Republics. The latter is also a region having large relatively untapped sources of oil and gas.

In these 20 years, the US military and its puppet regimes have carried out massive bombings, drone attacks, and brutal and indiscriminate 'search and destroy' missions against unknown insurgents and their families.

The US deaths, of soldiers and contractors, have been around 6500. In contrast, by extremely conservative estimates, the total Afghan deaths up to the end of 2019 were around 160,000. These include government soldiers, police, opposition fighters and civilians. Other sources which try to take a count of unreported deaths have estimates of civilian casualties alone running from a few hundred thousand to over a million in an overall population of 40 million.

Four million Afghans have been internally displaced with another 2.7 million external refugees. As of now, around 48% are below the national poverty line. Some progressive laws and reforms have taken place but they no more justify US presence and rule than the fact of the British building hospitals, schools and introducing some legislatures, elections and a limited franchise.

The three lakh official Afghan forces included soldiers, police, and special militias. They numbered five to six times more than the Taliban fighters. They were also equipped with the most advanced arsenal of weapons and had full control of the airspace. Yet they dramatically collapsed. This indicates that the Taliban had ground support and public acquiescence beyond its predominantly Pushtun base.

However, it is strongly hostile to the Persian-speaking Tajiks who make up 27% of the population as compared to the 42% of Pushtuns. So, there is every reason to fear internal repression and even a possible civil war in future.

The Taliban may or may not have learnt something from its past international isolation and avoid some forms of social and civic repression. But given its history and social programme of religious sectarianism, an anti-democratic attitude, and anti-women measures there is every reason to oppose it forthrightly and without equivocation. It has declared it will impose Sharia Law.

Governments everywhere, including India's, will shed crocodile tears for the Afghan people but are only motivated by the crude and amoral considerations of realpolitik. Claiming to pursue the 'national interest', they will decide whether or when to establish diplomatic relations with the new Taliban

government; or else to join hands with other self-serving major powers like the Western Alliance or the possible front of Russia, China and Pakistan that looks more favourably at the new dispensation in Afghanistan.

No Afghan government has ever accepted the Durand line. The Taliban, with even stronger sympathies with Pushtuni nationalism, is not as beholden to Pakistan as the Islamophobic Modi government. India would like to whip up anti-Pakistan sentiment domestically which allows them to deepen the repression in Kashmir.

It is the good of the Afghan people and not our supposed 'national interest' that we must reflect on who and what we must support and oppose. There should be no economic sanctions against Afghanistan. These hurt the people much more than the elites that govern.





A basic test for the West and many other countries will come concerning the attitude they adopt towards the flow of Afghan refugees now and afterwards. **There should be no restriction to those seeking refuge or asylum and adequate provisions be made for them to stay or relocate to where they can.**



Humanitarian aid, on an appropriate scale, routed through progressive international and civil society organisations to this war-torn country is a must. No recognition of the Taliban regime while political, diplomatic and cultural pressures of various kinds (but not military) can play a role in pushing it to be less repressive in its laws and actions against women, ethnic and religious minorities.

A basic test for the West and many other countries will come concerning the attitude they adopt towards the flow of Afghan refugees now and afterwards. There should be no restriction to those seeking refuge or asylum and adequate provisions be made for them to stay or relocate to where they can. This holds for India as well.



Even before the advent of Modi, India was and remains a non-party to the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol which, among other things, rejects refoulement (forcible return of refugees to their places of displacement/persecution).

This Modi government has carried this out on several Rohingyas simply because they are Muslims. This hostility to Muslims and Islam is also reflected in the Citizenship Amendment Act applicable to Afghanistan. While New Delhi may, in current circumstances, allow for selective refugee influx, this is not enough. A free flow must be allowed even as there can be a discussion among neighbouring States for sharing the responsibility.

Moreover, those Afghans, students and otherwise who are already in the country and wish to remain must have their visas extended until they feel confident of returning or they can, in due course, apply for Indian citizenship.

**‘NO’ TO IMPERIALISM,
‘NO’ TO THE TALIBAN**





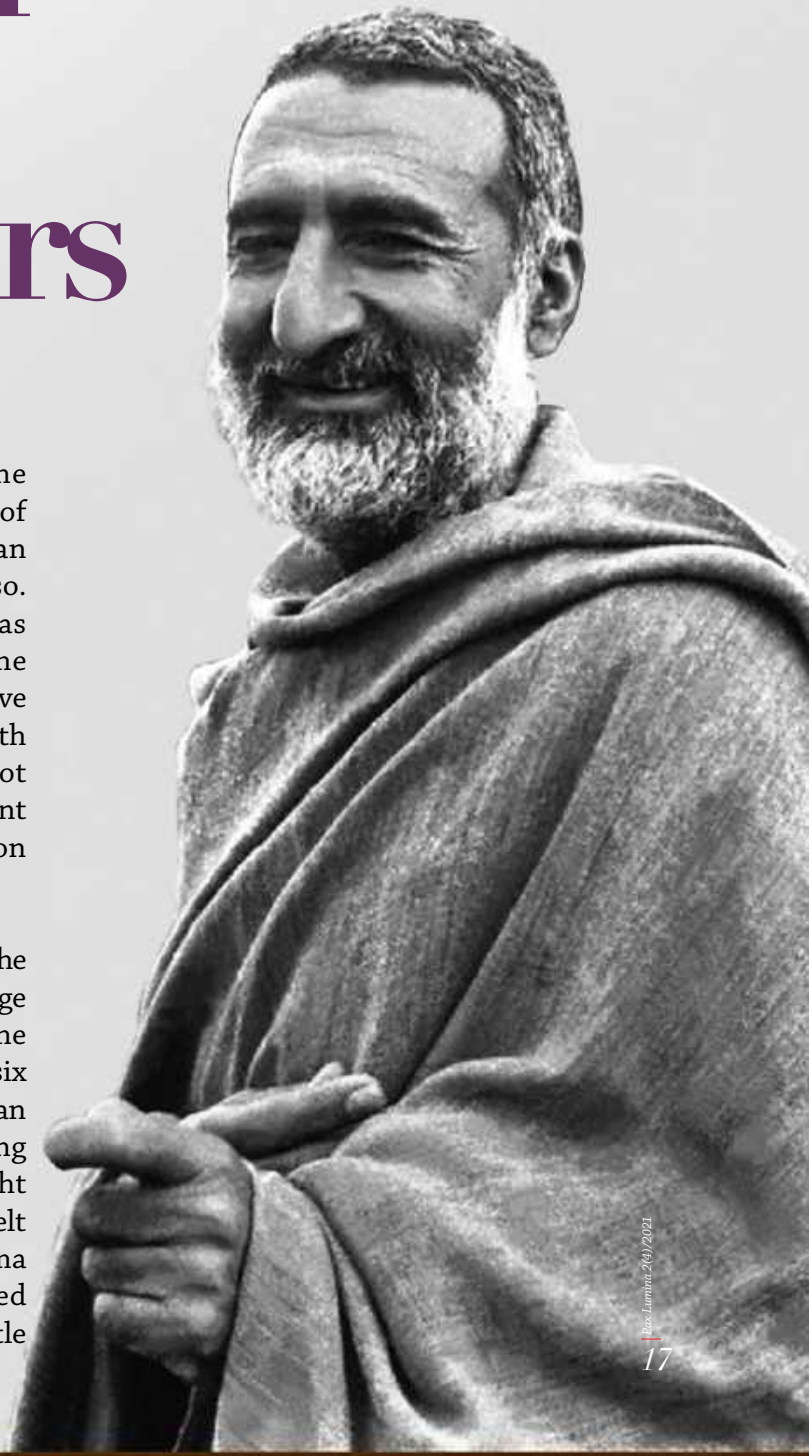
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Pax Lumina 2(5) / 2021 / 17-21

The Inimitable Afghan Peace Warriors

The dominant discourse in the print, digital and social media of the last week has been ‘Taliban and Afghanistan’, and rightly so. The speed with which the country was overrun by the Taliban forces took the world by surprise. Implied in the narrative was a totalising frame of Afghanistan with Taliban and vice versa. Afghanistan is not the Taliban; it is much more. It is an ancient land of civilisational people of uncommon valour and resilience.

In 1971, Khan Abdul Gaffar Khan visited the Aga Khan Palace in Pune to pay his homage at the samadhi of Kasturba Gandhi, the revered wife of Mahatma Gandhi. Over six feet tall with black hair and beard, a Pathan in his long kurta looked a commanding figure. His gentle persuasive voice caught the attention of the motley crowd; he dwelt on the person and message of Mahatma Gandhi. Our young minds were ignited with the desire to learn of Gandhi. Little



did we know then about the Muslim Gandhi - Badshah Khan, Frontier Gandhi, and his unique revolutionary movement in the North-West Frontier province of Afghanistan.

Making of a Peace-warrior

Born in Utmanzai, Charsadda, in Afghanistan, of the then British India on February 6, 1890, father of four children, the well-known Badshah Khan died on January 20, 1988, in Peshawar. By then he had spent several years in jail in Pakistan. His grave is in Jalalabad, across the Khyber in Afghanistan. The burial in Jalalabad caused other unprecedented events. A one-day ceasefire was declared in the Soviet-Afghan war so that mourners could safely traverse the distance between Peshawar and Jalalabad, the two cities at either end of the Khyber Pass which marks the official boundary between Afghanistan and Pakistan.

His family were wealthy landowners. At a very early age, he committed himself



Gandhi and Khan shared a vision. They dreamed of an independent, undivided, secular India - an India where both Hindus and Muslims would live together in peace.

Khan repeated over and over again that the concept of non-violence was anchored in the Quran and would be used as a weapon in 'jihad', or 'holy war.'



to eradicating poverty and realised the importance of education and literacy for society. When he was only 20 years old, he founded his first school and travelled throughout British India to spread his ideas. Khan believed that people should earn respect based on their deeds, not on their class background. He condemned privileges and conducted himself with modesty, honesty and courage. It was at this time one of his many nicknames stuck: Badshah Khan, "King of all leaders."

Khan met Gandhi and entered politics in 1919 during the agitation over the Rowlatt Acts, which allowed the internment of political dissidents without trial. In the following year, he joined the Khilafat movement, which sought to strengthen the spiritual ties of Indian Muslims to the Turkish sultan. In 1921, he was elected president of a district Khilafat committee in his native North-West Frontier province. After attending an Indian National Congress gathering in 1929, Khan founded the Red Shirt movement (Khudai Khitmatgar - Servants of God) among the Pashtuns.

It espoused nonviolent nationalist agitation in support of Indian independence and sought to awaken the Pashtuns' political



consciousness. By the late 1930s, Khan had become a member of Gandhi's inner circle of advisers, and the Khudai Khitmatgar actively aided the Congress Party's cause up to the partition of India in 1947.

In post-British time, Khan, who had always opposed the partition, chose to live in Pakistan, where he continued to fight for the rights of the Pashtun minority, and an autonomous Pashtunistan, an independent State in the border areas of West Pakistan. He paid dearly for his principles, spending many years in jail and afterwards residing in Afghanistan.

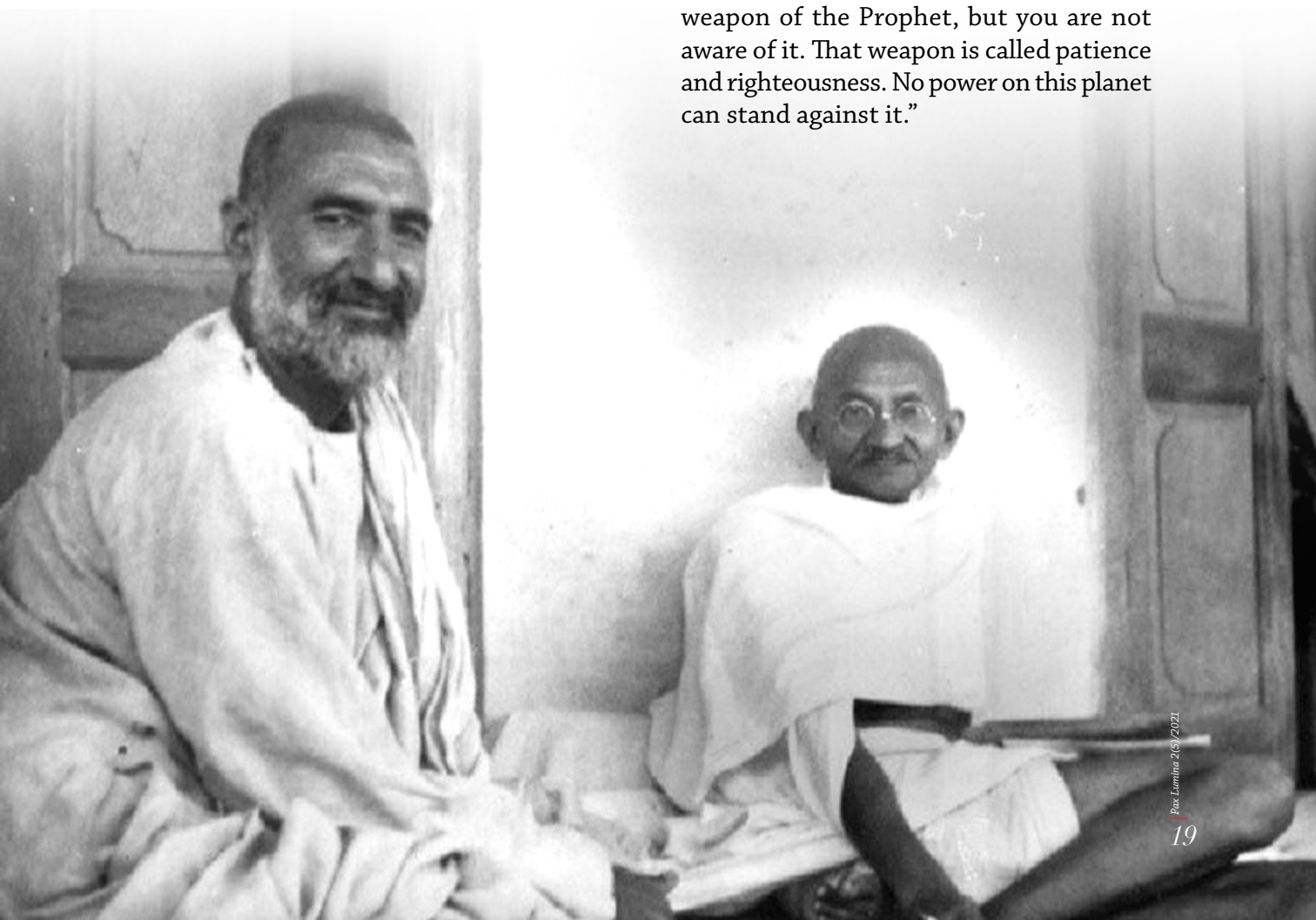
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A devout Muslim and committed ally of Gandhi, Khan, for almost eighty years, struggled incessantly for the rights of his people without ever raising arms. **Like Gandhi, Khan believed that the upliftment of his people was essential preparation for independence.**



in 'jihad', or 'holy war.' He said, "It is the weapon of the Prophet, but you are not aware of it. That weapon is called patience and righteousness. No power on this planet can stand against it."





Khudai Khidmatgar: The Movement

Strongly inspired by Gandhi's strategy of nonviolence, Khan amassed the world's first major nonviolent army in the North-West Frontier region. He persuaded 100,000 of his countrymen to lay down guns and vow to fight nonviolently against the British regime. He termed this army the Khudai Khidmatgar, the servants of Allah. It was no mean achievement, considering the bloody and barbaric history of the Pashtun community. It was a history that was full of invasions, massacres, conquests and occupations. The Khudai Khidmatgar movement espoused nonviolent, nationalist agitation in support of Indian independence and sought to awaken the Pashtuns' political consensus.

By demanding that India should not be partitioned after the end of British rule, Khan managed to make many enemies amongst Muslims. Khan came in for harsh criticism from many of his followers who favoured partition into an independent Hindu-majority India and a Muslim-majority Pakistan. It was at this time that he was given a second nickname: 'Frontier Gandhi', meaning the Gandhi from the Northwest border.

Khudai Khidmatgar was Khan's greatest achievement because he brought Gandhi's message to Muslims in the border province. He grew into this movement. "As a young boy, I had violent tendencies. The hot blood of the Pathans flowed in my veins. But in jail, I had nothing to do except read the Koran. I read about the Prophet Mohammed in Mecca, about his patience, his suffering, and his dedication. I had read it all before, as a child but now I read it in the light of what I was hearing all around me about Gandhiji's struggle against the British Raj...when I finally met Gandhiji, I learned all about his ideas of nonviolence and his Constructive Programme. It changed my life forever."

A devout Muslim and committed ally of Gandhi, Khan, for almost eighty years, struggled incessantly for the rights of his people without ever raising arms. Like Gandhi, Khan believed that the upliftment of his people was essential preparation for independence.

Khan opened schools in the province, brought women into the mainstream of society, and encouraged his nonviolent soldiers to vow to do at least two hours of social work daily. Aware of the pervasive violence in his society, Khan decided to gather people on religious and humanistic grounds.

Khan believed that the world was going in the direction of violence and hatred, but the only way forward is non-violence. The Holy Prophet Mohammed came into the world



He held that his religion was truth, love and service to God and humanity. **Those who are indifferent to the welfare of their fellowmen, whose hearts are empty of love, do not know the meaning of religion.**



and taught us: “That man is a Muslim who never hurts anyone by word or deed, but who works for the benefit and happiness of God’s creatures. Belief in God is to love one’s fellow men.”

He held that his religion was truth, love and service to God and humanity. Those who are indifferent to the welfare of their fellowmen, whose hearts are empty of love, do not know the meaning of religion.

Hence, he devoted his energies toward the establishment of a society that would be based on its principles of truth and peace. “Nothing is surprising in a Muslim or a Pathan like me subscribing to the creed of nonviolence. It is not a new creed. It was followed fourteen hundred years ago by the prophet all the time he was in Mecca.”

It is my inmost conviction, Khan said, that Islam is amal, yakeen, muhabat - selfless service, faith and love. (The Frontier Gandhi: My Life and struggle, Abdul Gaffar Khan, Roli Books Pvt Ltd; New Delhi, 2021.)

Pledge of a Khudai Khidmatgar: Challenging Commitment.

- I am a Khudai Khidmatgar; and as God needs no service, but serving his creation is serving him, I promise to serve humanity in the name of God;
- I promise to refrain from violence and from taking revenge.
- I promise to forgive those who oppress me or treat me with cruelty.
- I promise to refrain from taking part in feuds and quarrels and from creating enmity.
- I promise to treat every Pathan as my brother and friend.
- I promise to refrain from anti-social customs and practices.
- I promise to live a simple life, to practise virtue and to refrain from evil.
- I promise to practise good manners and good behaviour and not to lead a life of idleness.
- I promise to devote at least two hours a day to social work.

Afghanistan belongs to a civilisational people of great tradition and stature. The story of Khan and Khudai Khidmatgar testifies to it. Looking through that glass, it is hoped that the resilience of the great people of Afghanistan will find a way of nurturing peace and nonviolence, despite the present-day tragedy of being reckoned as the violent playing fields of world powers and terrorists.

(The author is Former Professor, Visva-Bharati University, West Bengal)



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India

Striving for Peace and Amity

Pax Lumina 2(5) / 2021 / 22-24

The past few decades in India have been dominated by issues related to identity. The Ram temple, holy cow-beef, love jihad, conversions and gharwapasi are some of them. These issues have marginalised the issues which should aim to alleviate the problems of the daily life of the people. The rise of communal forces, which do politics in the name of the 'identity of religion', has, at the same time, worsened the plight of most sections of society.

India has been sliding down on the indices related to hunger, employment, health, freedom and general well-being. This is due to politics which aims to revive the old values of caste and gender relationships and has nothing to do with the spiritual or moral aspects of religion.

India has been inhabited by the people of major world religions. The different traditions of Hinduism have been there for centuries. Jainism and Buddhism came up with the principles of non-violence and equality. Christianity also came in the first century AD and Islam in the seventh century.

The interaction between communities of different religions enriched all and led to syncretism at various levels. Bhakti and Sufi traditions had a lot of influence on Hinduism and Islam. Sikhism also came up against this backdrop. Christianity contributed to various facets of the community, particularly in health and education.

There are Christian shrines where people of all religions frequent, like Mother Mary of Velankanni. Undoubtedly, people of different religions frequent the shrines of saints of diverse religions.



The older sections of society, the landlords and kings, Hindus and Muslims, took recourse to politics in the name of religion and the culmination of their politics was communal violence and the partition of the country.

While there was some strife between the subsets of religions, like Shaiva and Vaishnav on the one hand and Shia and Sunni on the other, the use of religion for goals of power was not dominant. During the period of kingdoms, kings had people of diverse religions in their courts. The interaction in the areas of food, music, literature and architecture led to the rich cultural development in the subcontinent.

With the coming of the British, the social structure and relationships started changing. The introduction of modern education and industries led to new equations in society. The newly emerging classes focused on the problems related to industrialisation, the spread of education and the integration of the people of the subcontinent into the overarching identity of being Indian. The secular, plural values developed without trampling on the religiosity of the people.

The greatest example of this had been Mahatma Gandhi, a Sanatan Hindu, who followed the inclusive politics of secularism. Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, a practising Muslim, did not talk of a State in the name of Islam. He also felt that politics in the name of religion is counterproductive.

The older sections of society, the landlords and kings, Hindus and Muslims, took recourse to politics in the name of religion and the culmination of their politics was communal violence and the partition of the country.

After Independence people did have the freedom to practice, preach and propagate their religion. The country was on the path of development, education, health facilities, scientific institutions and the promotion of industrialisation. This was undertaken at high speed, though with many shortcomings. Overall, the emphasis was on bread-and-butter issues, better education and health, and affirmative action for the weaker sections of society.

The Dalit empowerment began, and women started coming to the social space in good measure and religious minorities, despite some flaws, lived with some freedom and security.

From the decades of the 1980s, issues like Shah Bano and Ram temple raised the emotive pitch of the communities and also derailed the direction of our republic, from the one committed to progress to one which embarked on the divisive path in the name of religion.

Attacks on religious minorities became the norm. The anti-Sikh pogrom of 1984 was a tragedy of immense proportions. The anti-Muslim violence and later anti-Christian violence became regular and repetitive. In 1992-93 Mumbai, 2002 Gujarat, 2013 Muzzafarnagar and 2020 Delhi riots the Muslim community suffered grievously.

The brutal murder of Pastor Graham Staines and the anti-Christian violence of 2008 in Kandhamal became prominent, but the sub-radar anti-Christian violence has become an ongoing phenomenon in today's India.

The violence is preceded by hate against minorities. This, in turn, is the product of misconceptions that are regularly spread against these communities. This is done through communal organisations, which operate in the name of religion. Many regularly held programmes and training camps; intellectual sessions are the core of this phenomenon. This is enlarged by social media and a large section of TV and print media.

We need to return to the values which united us. While we can take a lot of inspiration from Bhakti and Sufi traditions, we can enhance the moral values coming from all religions. We can also draw from the syncretic culture which has developed through the interaction of diverse religious communities. What is important is to communicate to the people that religion is a moral path, a path

The violence is preceded by hate against minorities. This, in turn, is the product of misconceptions that are regularly spread against these communities. This is done through communal organisations, which operate in the name of religion.

promoting amity between diverse sections of society. It is a service to the poor and for those struggling for their human rights.

We have seen people like Swami Agnivesh struggling for the rights of bonded labour. Dr. Asghar Ali Engineer and many like him struggled for peace and amity in society, especially for the rights of the women and the marginalised sections of society.

Fr. Stan Swamy is a glorious example of the struggle for the marginalised sections of society. While others have misused religion's identity for narrow political goals, these are the examples that stood for peace, harmony and rights of the weaker sections of society.

Religion is primarily the spiritual strength to struggle for welfare, dignity and rights of the poor and the marginalised. That's precisely the path for peace and justice for which we have to strive.

(Ram Puniyani is the former Professor of Biomedical Engineering and former Senior Medical Officer affiliated with the Indian Institute of Technology, Bombay)

“Women are the Worst Sufferers”

An interview with Syeda Hameed, an Indian social and women's rights activist, educationist, writer and a former member of the Planning Commission of India. She is the founder trustee of the Women's Initiative for Peace in South Asia and the Centre for Dialogue and Reconciliation. She was formerly the Chancellor of the Maulana Azad National Urdu University, Hyderabad. The Government of India awarded her the Padma Shri, in 2007, for her contributions to Indian society.



? Many factors affect the state of peace of a community, a society, a country and ultimately the planet itself. How does religion play a role in maintaining or disrupting peace at different levels of society?

Although religions were meant to pull down the walls of separation which imprison human hearts and minds and to promote the idea of one humanity, they have been used for conflicts and wars. The promise of heaven and fear of hell is invoked to lure people into committing the worst violence on fellow human beings.

? Is religious fundamentalism on the rise in other regions leading to instability and violent marginalisation of the weak and the unprotected especially women and children. What about the situation in South Asian countries?

Islamic fundamentalism is on the rise globally. Hindu fundamentalism is equally on the rise in India. Outcomes of both fundamentalisms assail our senses every day through all media platforms. The Taliban are in Afghanistan and their mirror image is closer to home. Violence is the norm of both, whether it is against a bangle seller in Meerut or the LGBTQ community in Kabul. Even Christianity is tainted.

Women are the worst sufferers. In its second phase, the Taliban may be no different than what it was in its first phase. All Quranic injunctions about women are violated in the name of Islam itself.

A religion that gave property rights to women 1436 years ago is presented in a harsh anti-gender frame. My organisation, the Muslim Women's Forum has been holding workshops on understanding Islam across the country. We derive our teaching from the word of the Quran to explain Islam as it was revealed to the Prophet in the first year of the Islamic calendar i.e. 680 AD.

? Is it true that in countries where religion does not play a very active role in society the level of peace is better?

Sadly, the contention is true. Islamic States which enact Sharia laws are oppressive and totalitarian regimes. In a parallel manner, if rules of Manusmiriti are enacted and Hindu law becomes the edict, India will become a mirror image of its neighbouring countries. For Islam, I can aver that if its teachings were enacted in a state which calls itself the Islamic Republic, there would be universal peace. Peace is at the heart of Islam. The universal Islamic greeting, 'As-Salam Alekum' means 'May Peace be upon you'.

? How do inter-religious conflicts compounded by economic, ethnic, social, cultural and political facts pose a threat to peace?

This question contains its answer within itself. The Indian media is our daily reminder of the inter-religious conflicts which are tearing to shreds the fabric of our society.



Women are the worst sufferers. In its second phase, the Taliban may be no different than what it was in its first phase. All Quranic injunctions about women are violated in the name of Islam itself.

? **In the present scenario of intolerance and violence what are the religious initiatives for peace that have emerged in different parts of the world which provide humanity with hope?**

Peace initiatives have been taken all over the world from times immemorial. Islam, for example, was a peace initiative at a time when the Arabian peninsula was fraught with every conceivable ingredient of violence. Peace initiatives have been the creed of all religious denominations. Jesus was the Prince of Peace, hence churches across the world have adhered to his appellation. The founders of Buddhism, Hinduism and Sikhism were the original harbingers of peace. Closer to home despite three wars and unending border skirmishes, there have been many peace initiatives between Pakistan and India. Women have been at the vanguard of many. For example, Women's Initiative for Peace in South Asia, and more recently, the South Asia Peace Action Network, to name just two.

? **Advancement in technology can ideally lead to peaceful cooperation and co-existence of peoples, societies, and nations. Does this also lead to the violent assertion of religious, ethnic and racial identities? Can religion provide a solution?**

While the advancement in technology can lead to peaceful coexistence, the reverse is happening across the world. Technology is used to foment hate at an alarming speed across the globe. The adverse use of technology is leading to its rejection by some who foresee its deleterious effect. The unfortunate outcome of this dichotomy needs to be confronted and tackled.

? **Any other ideas or experiences that you would like to share with the readers?**

In Surah Al Maidah (Surah 5 Verse 32) The Quran says: Anna man qatala-a nafasun u fasaad fil arz. The seven words from the Surah offer the essence of Peace in Islam. The verse itself is the best argument for peace; its explication below is echoed in all faiths.

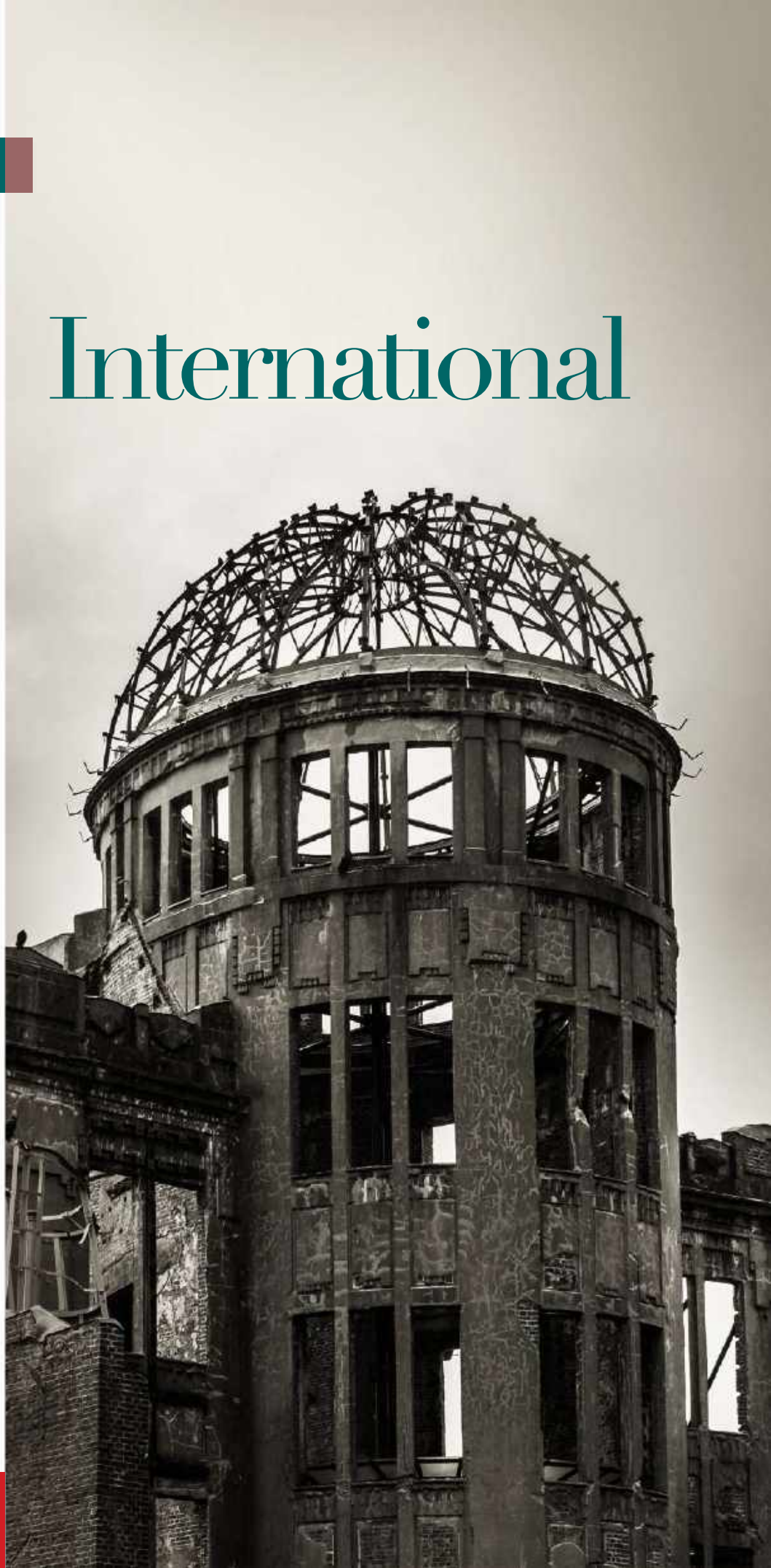
“If anyone kills a person except by retribution for a murder he is as guilty as if he has killed the whole human race. And he who saves the life of a single person is the one who has saved the whole human race. Our Prophets have come with clear arguments against fighting and murder. And yet many have committed excesses on earth.”



International

*Each one has
to find his peace
from within. And
peace to be real
must be unaffected
by outside
circumstances.*

- Mahatma Gandhi





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Religion, Conflict and Pakistan

The Way Forward

Conflict is a component of human existence. But conflict does not pose as great a threat to human civilisation as does how it is dealt with. Conflict's inevitability has led humankind to explore mechanisms to deal with it.

The partition of India in 1947 had a drastic impact, not only on the course of history but also on the lives of millions of people. Religious fundamentalism, intolerance and communal violence have impacted India, Pakistan and Bangladesh in different ways.

Inter-religious Conflict in Pakistan

The idea of Pakistan, the word translates into The Land of the Pure, has led to contested claims of religious purity. It was this notion of purity that led

to communal violence in the 20th century and the partition of India. The same notion continues to impact contemporary Pakistani society.

The construction of a self-image based on religious purity by belonging to a group leads to positive self-esteem. But it also leads to social comparisons with other groups. This translates into ingroup favouritism and discrimination against other groups.

It is this ingroup affiliation that leads to economic, ethnic, social, cultural, and political discrimination of the religious minorities. Thus, it poses a serious threat to peace in Pakistan. Some groups have resorted to violence to maintain this religious purification.

The ethos of ingroup affiliation and outgroup discrimination have also led to conflict among members of the same religion.

Pakistani society at large has grown more intolerant of its religious minorities and the different sects within Islam.

Religious Fundamentalism, Women and Children

Religious fundamentalism is intertwined with violence and marginalisation. In the midst of growing religious intolerance, the weak continue to suffer. Women and children continue to be the victims. Their rights to education and work, freedom of movement and to make choices of their own are not recognised as priorities.

Religious views determine cultural values and are often used as a means to justify acts of violence against women and children. What is noteworthy is that

The construction of a self-image based on religious purity by belonging to a group leads to positive self-esteem. But it also leads to social comparisons with other groups. This translates into ingroup favouritism and discrimination against other groups.





often discussions on religion and the rights of minorities, women and children are overshadowed by differing religious opinions and a lack of a balanced approach vis-à-vis religion and women empowerment.

However, the resistance against this marginalisation is gaining momentum.

The Initiatives in Pakistan

The conflict born out of religious intolerance is an opportunity for dialogue. This dialogue remains the key in any attempt for sustainable peace and coexistence in Pakistan. As an undergraduate student, I have witnessed a growing interest in exploring what 'others' believe: their ethnic differences, cultural values, religious outlook, and views on moving forward.

In educational institutes today, teachers and students are creating spaces to talk about their differences in a respectful manner.

What is noteworthy is that often discussions on religion and the rights of minorities, women and children are overshadowed by differing religious opinions and a lack of a balanced approach vis-à-vis religion and women empowerment.

I have been part of a group that comprised students from different ethnicities, religions, and sects within Islam. The university was the space where students could talk about social issues, the role religion plays and can play, and their differences. More such spaces need to be created, where people can share their views without fear of violence.



■

The other solution is peace education. This remains almost absent from the Pakistani curriculum. This leads to the otherness of communities from an early age. It is by addressing this issue that students can relate to one another with respect.

During these meetings, members of different faiths can relate to one another not as strangers but as human beings with their problems, values, insights and ways to deal with conflict.

The other solution is peace education. This remains almost absent from the Pakistani curriculum. This leads to the otherness of communities from an early age. It is by addressing this issue that students can relate to one another with respect.

Pakistan has suffered from religious intolerance. It does not lack the space nor the potential to create tolerance. Any attempt to create peace needs to use these local spaces, with a bottom-up approach and a focus on peace education.

(The author is pursuing Masters in Peace and Conflict Studies at University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, Canada)



Different religious organisations seek to create that space where dialogue can take place. The Jesuits in Pakistan deserve praise; they have invested their energy and resources in their inter-faith dialogue initiative. The Jesuits organise symposia where religious scholars from the two religious communities engage in scholarly discussions. The Robert A Butler SJ library offers access to rare scholarly materials.





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Enchanted by Extremes

The Search for the Lost Centre in America





Summer and fall 2020 saw the United States go through one of the most difficult periods in its recent history. While the country was in the grip of an unprecedented pandemic, political polarisation was pushed to a breaking point.

So-called 'blue states', ruled by Democratic Party representatives, introduced strict regulations about social distancing and wearing of masks, often closing down large sectors of the economy in an attempt to limit the spread of the virus.

'Red states', under Republican rule, were often reluctant to introduce restrictions of any kind. If they did so, they were met with considerable resistance from large swathes of the population. They viewed them as unacceptable violations of their constitutional rights.

Rather than bringing the country together, Covid intensified its division almost to a breaking point. The wearing of a mask -- or the refusal to do so -- would turn into a symbol of one's political allegiance. Conservative media commentators claimed that the obligation to cover one's face in stores or public was dehumanising and an oppressive government imposition.

The impact of Covid on the economy, with millions of people facing unemployment or a significant loss of income, exacerbated yet another fracture in American society: race.

The Black Lives Matters (BLM) movement led to numerous protests across America. Cities like Portland experienced rioting almost daily for weeks on end. While many protests were peaceful and motivated by an authentic concern for racial justice, some degenerated into violence and distraction, causing even more damage to an economy already weakened by the pandemic. The BLM was protesting the disproportionate use of violence by the police towards African Americans.

As the presidential election neared, the political conversation became ever more strident. Each side increasingly viewed the other side as a manifestation of 'pure evil.' President Donald Trump's refusal to concede the election and the endless recounts that took place in November and December monopolised everyone's attention for two months, until the assault on the Capitol on January 6. This marked one of the lowest points in American democracy since its founding.

One year later, it would be tempting to say that all of this is in the past. This summer has hardly seen any rioting. The BLM no longer appears in the news. While Congress remains as divided as ever, the public appears to be less focused on domestic politics.

The crisis in Afghanistan seems to have redirected the attention of political pundits to a more long-term evaluation of American foreign policy (and its shortcomings). And of course, Covid is still present in the country, despite growing rates of vaccination, forcing Americans to confront basic questions: will my children be able to go to school this fall? Will I have a job a year from now?



The impact of Covid on the economy, with millions of people facing unemployment or a significant loss of income, exacerbated yet another fracture in American society: race.



The tyranny of the need to make ends meet, to raise one's family, and to run one's business cannot erase the profound division that characterises American society. Often it appears that two societies are living together in the same country, with radically different visions of the world.

In this perspective, the Catholic Church has not always been up to its vocation as a reconciling force. Many of its priests and even bishops have taken highly partisan stances, embracing the agenda of one political party and accusing supporters of the other side of having betrayed the Gospel.

One side will foreground the classic 'non-negotiable' issues of sexual morality and abortion, and avoid all discussion of economic inequality or injustice, let alone the pressing question of ecological and climate collapse.

The other side will campaign for social justice and the rights of the immigrants, at the cost however of passing under silence pro-life matters such as the rights of the unborn. The election of President Joe Biden, the second Catholic president after John F Kennedy, did not bring together the Catholics. Many traditionally-minded Catholics are strongly opposed to his domestic policies and the overall direction of his presidency.

America is a society fascinated by extremes in 2021. Fifty years ago, Catholics and Protestants would hardly countenance any





of their offspring marrying a person of another religion. Today, interdenominational or interreligious marriages barely raise any eyebrows, but a majority of US citizens would never want one of their children to marry a supporter of the opposite political party.



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In many ways, the moderate centre has evaporated. Each party espouses ever more extreme versions of its policies. In several cases, religion has become subservient to a political agenda. The acceptance of certain political positions or the support of certain political candidates becomes a criterion of membership in a particular religious group.

The challenge Catholicism faces is to once more become a unifying factor in society to heal this exacerbated political divide. Many representatives of the Church hierarchy have stoked the fires of division instead of trying to build a broader consensus. In this context, the role of Jesuit institutions of higher education, and all Catholic colleges and universities, is to become venues where open conversations are possible and where all positions can be voiced and listened to with respect.

Without a sustained effort to reach out to one's opponent, the Catholic Church will only continue to reflect the divisions of broader American society.

(The author is Associate Professor of Christology and Cultures, Jesuit School of Theology at Santa Clara University and Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley, California)





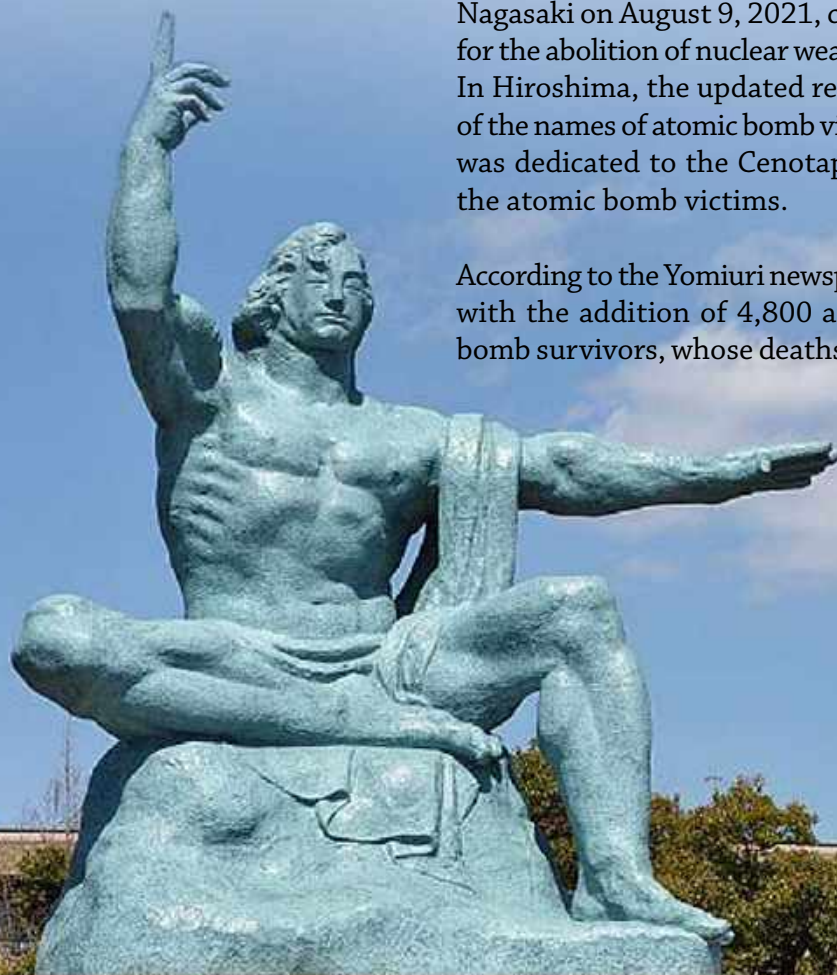
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Pax Lumina 2(5) / 2021 /37-41

Japan's Nuclear Position and Religious Response to Peace

Hiroshima marked the 76th anniversary of the atomic bombing of the city on August 5, and of Nagasaki on August 9, 2021, calling for the abolition of nuclear weapons. In Hiroshima, the updated register of the names of atomic bomb victims was dedicated to the Cenotaph for the atomic bomb victims.

According to the Yomiuri newspaper, with the addition of 4,800 atomic bomb survivors, whose deaths were



confirmed in the past year, 328,929 victims are now listed in the register. As of the end of March, the number of holders of atomic bomb survivor's certificates was 127,755 nationwide, down from the previous year.

The average age of the holders was around 84 years. That means the real voices and witnesses are slowly disappearing who were calling on the world about the pain and meaninglessness of war and disastrous weapons. According to a survey conducted by the Yomiuri Newspaper and the Centre for Peace at Hiroshima University, many of those who engage in activities to share their experience of the atomic bombing are concerned that the horror and inhumanity of nuclear weapons will be forgotten if nothing is done.

In the context of Covid protocol, this ceremony was attended by only a limited number of people, including the atomic bomb survivors, representatives of victims' families, and ambassadors of various countries to Japan.

In his peace declaration, the Mayor of Hiroshima Matsui Kasumi said, "No sustainable society is possible with these weapons continually poised for indiscriminate slaughter. The combined wisdom of all peoples must be trained on their total abolition."



The government and many people in Japan believe that without relying on the US nuclear umbrella, it is impossible to ensure peace and security in the region.

It has been a conflicting reality every year that Japan's nuclear policy and its nuclear umbrella coverage of the US-Japan security agreement doesn't go along with the voices of the Hibakusha (atomic bomb survivors), religious and peace activists. In a message at Hiroshima, Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga said, "To promote nuclear disarmament, it is necessary to persistently make efforts while mediating among countries with various positions."

But, despite its stand for world peace without nuclear weapons, Japan failed to sign the 'Treaty on the Prohibition of nuclear weapons', which comprehensively bans the use and other purposes of nuclear weapons, in January, 2021. It is because of the position of the nuclear powers and those who are protected under the nuclear umbrella.

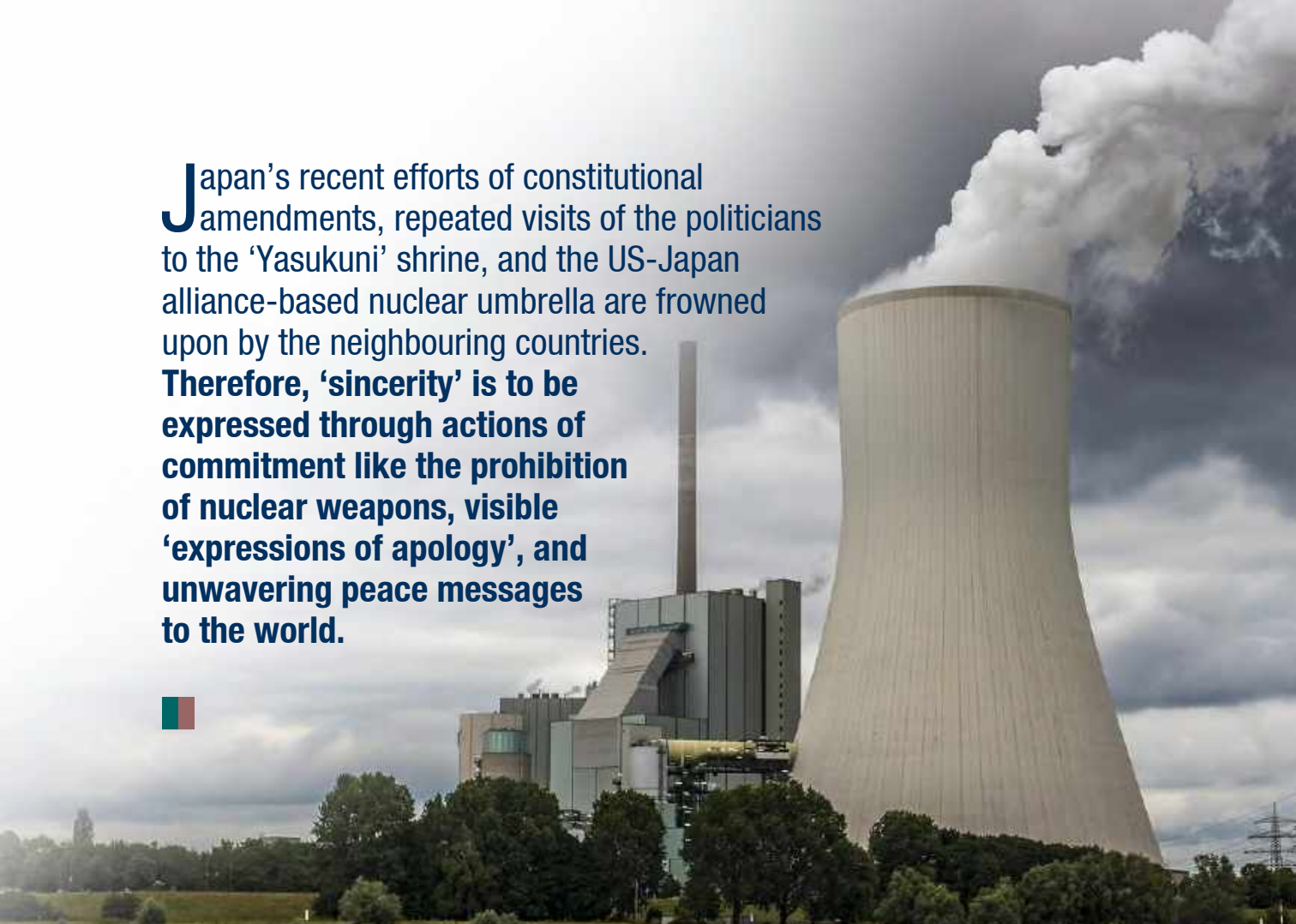
Many people in Japan and the government believe that without relying on the US nuclear umbrella, it is impossible to ensure peace and security in the region around Japan.

On the other hand, after World War II, Japan's neighbours have repeatedly asked Japan to apologise for its misdeeds in the war, but the repeated apologies by the leaders have failed to satisfy the victims. The apologies are not felt to be 'sincere' since they are contradicted by visits of politicians to the Yasukuni Shrine in Tokyo (a Japanese Shinto shrine to the war dead who served the Emperor of Japan during the wars from 1867–1951) and by controversies about the depiction of the war in Japanese history textbooks.

The difficulty with 'sincere' apologies is that some Japanese have not been willing to see themselves as straightforward perpetrators of unjust war, but continue to see themselves, at least in the past, as the victims.

Japan's recent efforts of constitutional amendments, repeated visits of the politicians to the 'Yasukuni' shrine, and the US-Japan





Japan's recent efforts of constitutional amendments, repeated visits of the politicians to the 'Yasukuni' shrine, and the US-Japan alliance-based nuclear umbrella are frowned upon by the neighbouring countries. **Therefore, 'sincerity' is to be expressed through actions of commitment like the prohibition of nuclear weapons, visible 'expressions of apology', and unwavering peace messages to the world.**



alliance based nuclear umbrella are frowned upon by the neighbouring countries. Therefore, 'sincerity' is to be expressed through actions of commitment like the prohibition of nuclear weapons, visible 'expressions of apology', and unwavering peace messages to the world.

Religion's Response to Peace without Nuclear Weapons

However, religious leaders in Hiroshima and Nagasaki welcomed the entry into force of the Treaty on the Prohibition of nuclear weapons, even as Japan's Christian Council 'regrets' that the government has not supported or ratified the treaty.

"We ask the government of Japan to sign the nuclear weapons ban treaty as soon as possible," the National Christian Council in Japan said in a January 27 statement. Announcing the 7th Global Inter-Religious Conference on Article 9 of the Japanese Peace

Constitution in March, the council said the treaty 'collects the wisdom of humanity', and is 'a major step in humanity's long walk toward hope and ideals.'

Pope John Paul II spoke on February 25, 1981, in Hiroshima at the Peace Memorial. This is memorialised on a monument at the entrance. 'War is the work of man. War is the destruction of human life. War is death. To remember the past is to commit oneself to the future... To remember Hiroshima is to abhor nuclear war... To remember Hiroshima is to commit oneself to peace... Let us promise our fellow human beings, we will work untiringly for disarmament and the banishing of all nuclear weapons'.

Following this, the Bishops' Conference of Japan decided to designate the period from August 6, the day Hiroshima was bombed, until August 15, the day the war ended, as 'Ten Days of Prayer for Peace'. This practice began in 1982 and continues to this day.



Several Japanese religious groups, especially some of the New Religions, **have promoted peace as a major theme of their doctrine and activities, often explicitly supporting a pacifist position.**



Several Japanese religious groups, especially some of the New Religions, have promoted peace as a major theme of their doctrine and activities, often explicitly supporting a pacifist position (one of the characteristics which appear to distinguish the new Japanese religions from the traditional religions is their universalistic orientation and global appeal).

The oldest of the new Japanese religions is Tenrikyo, founded in 1838 by a peasant woman, who proclaimed 'to go to every corner of the world to save'. Tenrikyo emphasised


universal salvation and individual joy. Soka Gakkai (since 1930), Reiyukai (since 1919), and Rissho Kosei Kai (since 1938) are new religions derived from the Nichiren school of Buddhism.

Their approach is pacific, and their focus is on the world. The international focus of Soka Gakkai and its appeal to 'Peace, culture, and education' began in the 1970s. Rissho Kosei Kai plays a major role in the sponsoring and the organisation of the 'World Conference for Religion and Peace'.


Some of these new religions represent a complex mixture of universalistic and nationalistic attitudes, of concern with, on the one hand, world peace, and, on the other, the preservation and promotion of Japanese culture and values.

They also draw on a tradition that emphasises individual moral cultivation and use of prewar terms, with the idea of establishing peace through the spread of Japanese civilisation. Although these groups have contributed to antiwar and antinuclear movements, there have been relatively few concerted attempts to respond to the question of how we might understand the atomic bombing from within a particular religious framework.





In contemporary Japanese society, it is not generally recognised that religion can fulfil a positive social function. In Japan, the adherence of some of the institutional religions like Christianity is dropping, **and religions are often looked upon with suspicion, after the poison gas attack on the Tokyo subway by a new religious group (OUM Shinrikyo) on March 20, 1995.**



Pope Francis visited both cities on his Apostolic Journey to Japan in November, 2019. Going one step further from Pope John Paul II, he declared that the possession and use of nuclear weapons are ‘immoral.’ He stressed on the need for unity and working together toward a world free of nuclear weapons and committed the Church to the goal. “The use of atomic energy for purposes of war is immoral, just as the possession of nuclear weapons is immoral” (Pope Francis, Hiroshima, November 24, 2019).

A world of peace, free from nuclear weapons, is the aspiration of millions of men and women everywhere. The Pope said that to make this ideal a reality it calls for involvement of individuals, religious communities and civil society, countries that possess nuclear weapons and those that do not, the military and private sectors, and international organisations.

“Our response to the threat of nuclear weapons must be joint and concerted. We must never grow weary of working to support the principal international legal instruments of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation, including the Treaty on the prohibition of nuclear weapons,” said Pope Francis at Hypocentre Park, Nagasaki, on November 24, 2019.

In contemporary Japanese society, it is not generally recognised that religion can fulfil a positive social function. In Japan, the adherence of some of the institutional religions like Christianity is dropping, and religions are often looked upon with suspicion, after the poison gas attack on the Tokyo subway by a new religious group (OUM Shinrikyo) on March 20, 1995.

About 72% of Japanese nationals claim to have no personal religious faith or 69% claim not following any religion. This is based on a recent study by the Institute of Statistical Mathematics and the JGSS Research Centre. In this social context, the message of Pope Francis for joint and concerted efforts of religious and nonreligious players for peace is crucial in Japan. The Pope’s message is also an invitation to take the neighbouring countries, especially China and North and South Korea, into confidence for real collaboration for peace.

“If we are to build a world of peace, free from nuclear weapons, we must involve everyone,” said the Pope.

Responding to the pope’s call, the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Japan issued a letter in December, 2019 in its president’s name to Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, urging the signing and ratification of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons.

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Timeless



(The
Madhubani
style of
painting
remains
as popular
as ever)

Madhubani painting is an indigenous folk painting style. It is practised in the Madhubani, Darbhanga, Muzaffarpur, Sahersa, and Purnea districts of Bihar and some parts of Nepal.



While examining the ravines in the area, the British officer of Madhubani district, William G. Archer chanced upon these paintings in the interior walls of the homes. Later, after the Bihar drought, art impresarios Pupul Jaykar and Bhaskar Kulkarni, who were on the lookout for folk and traditional art forms in India, nourished the talent of the Madhubani artists.

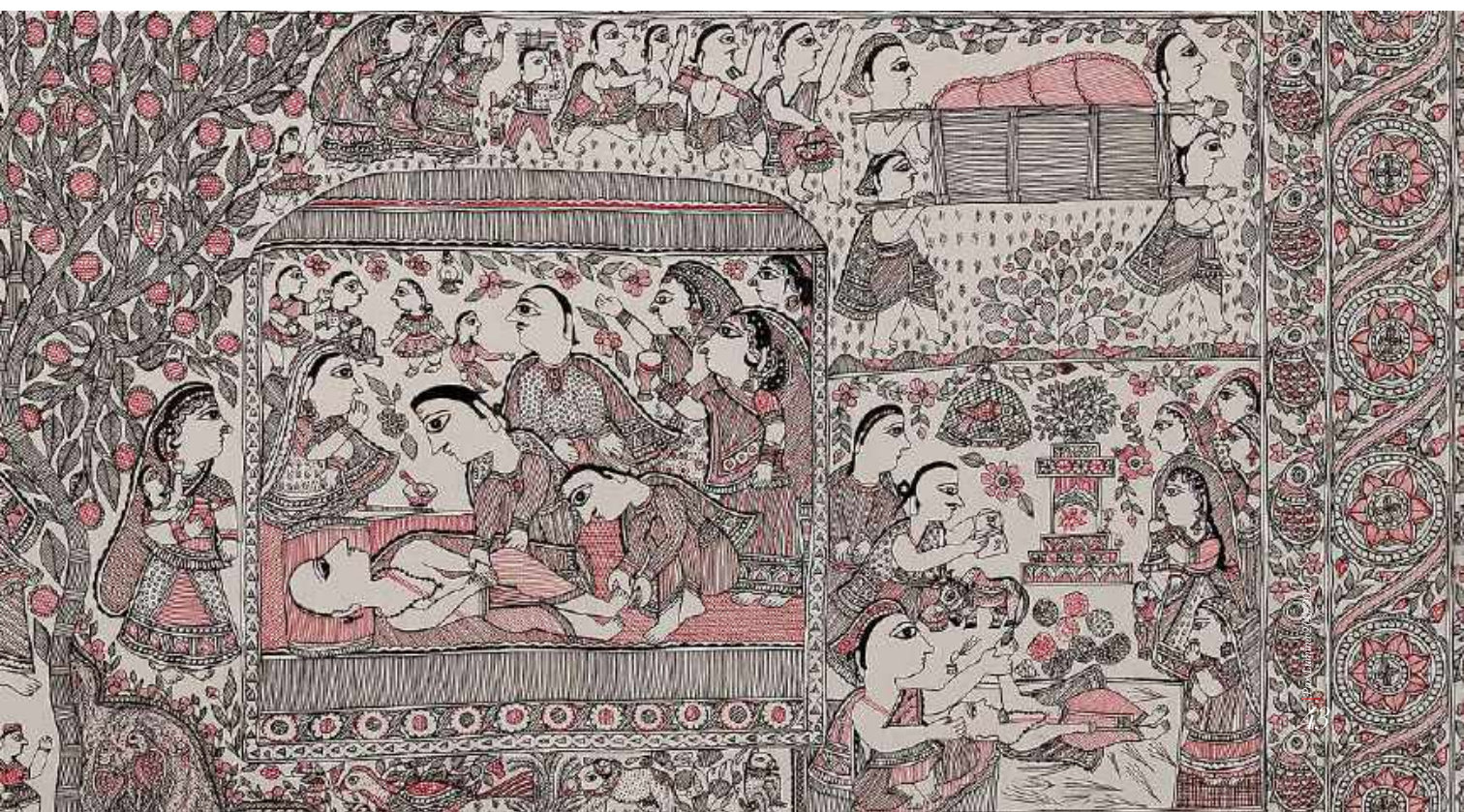
The origin of this art form was that it was made by the people in Mithila at the request of King Janak during the marriage of his daughter Sita Devi. Hence, this type of indigenous painting is also known as the Mithila painting.

These paintings have been traditionally done by the women who kept the art alive by teaching it to their daughters. Mithila paintings are characterised by simple drawings filled with bright colours and motifs of symbolic significance.

These wall paintings or Bhatti Chitra were discovered in 1934 after a massive earthquake destroyed a lot of structures in Bihar, especially in Darbhanga and nearby districts.

They were introduced to new methods like handmade paper. This resulted in freeing the art from walls. The art existed even before these artists, but these brilliant people from humble backgrounds, without any art school education, made their artworks through the age-old methods of the traditional painting styles. They brought glory to the art and introduced it to people from other places.

This is the only Indian folk visual art in which six women artists have won Padma Shri Awards. They include Jagadamba Devi (1901-1984) in 1975, Sita Devi (died: 2005) in 1981, Ganga Devi (1928-1991) in 1984, Mahasundari Devi (1922-2013) in 2011, Bauwa Devi in 2017, and Godavari Dutta in 2018.





The art existed even before these artists, but these brilliant people from humble backgrounds, without any art school education, made their artworks through the age-old methods of the traditional painting styles. They brought glory to the art and introduced it to people from other places.

The themes and designs painted are of Hindu deities and figures from mythology, wedding scenes, social happenings, day-to-day events and nature. Paintings are often filled with symbolism due to the use of motifs with symbolic representations. These artworks have a harmonious and rhythmic feel to them. Nowadays, artists have also taken up contemporary topics such as girls' education and the covid-19 pandemic awareness.

In Patna, the compound walls of schools, parks and other public places are all decorated with these paintings. They depict the topic connected with those structures. The railway station building and its nearby area of Darbhanga have Madhubani paintings. The air-conditioned coaches of the Bihar Sampark Kranti Express train, which runs from Darbhanga to New Delhi and back, are also decorated with these paintings.

Most of these artists followed the indigenous style by using mineral and organic pigments. The paintings used to be done on mud or a freshly plastered wall. The base, that is, the surface is prepared on handmade paper with a paste made by mixing cow dung, turmeric paste and mud and water from the Ganges.



According to Hindu belief, water from the Ganges gives purity to contaminated things and places. Since most of the images are of gods and goddesses, the purification practice was done before painting on the surface. Artists say it acts as an insect repellent.

Colour application and sketching are done using a Pihua -- a small piece of cloth tied to a bamboo stick. This is used for colouring. The brushes are made with thin bamboo sticks whose edge is smashed with stones into bristles. The colours range from different flowers to mud. The senior artists have advised others not to source the colours from materials that are plucked or acquired from other houses.

Madhubani artists prepare colours extracted from flowers and plants that have fallen to the ground. Eco-friendly materials such as cow dung, soot for black, rice powder or lime for white, rose for red, marigold flowers for golden yellow, shangupusham (neelkanth) flowers for blue, polo berries

for red and parijatham flowers for orange, katha (a component used in paan) is used to make brown and turmeric for yellow.

Some colours like red and brown are also obtained by the boiling of peepal bark. When the bark is boiled for one hour it turns red, and if boiled for two hours it becomes brown.

The Geruva colour (Indian red) is extracted from red mud. For painting walls, pigments (powder colours) are mixed with gum of neem or babool trees.

The colours are applied flatly with no space and without shading. Floral, animal and bird motifs, and geometrical designs are used to fill up all the gaps. Generally, a double-lined border is given to the paintings. These skills are handed down from generation

to generation, and hence the traditional designs and patterns are maintained.

There are many ritualistic and social aspects. Earlier, these paintings were connected to domestic rituals, pujas, religious fasting, certain festivals and weddings. For example, during Madhu Sravani (a ritual festival that happens during the rainy season), newly-wedded women do pooja of 108 snakes in their maternal home for a month and paint Madhubani paintings of snakes using turmeric and sandalwood paste.

These women did many different pujas for a year. Batrise Pooja is done on January 14. This festival is also considered as the end of the series of pujas for newly-wedded women. They do drawings with cow dung on mud. When women join together to do Madhubani paintings, they sing bhajans, traditional and folk songs.

There are different schools such as the Bharani style, Kachni style, Godna style and Tantrik style. There is one more type known as the Kohbar painting which is considered as the fifth style by some artists.



There are many ritualistic and social aspects. Earlier, these paintings were connected to domestic rituals, pujas, religious fasting, certain festivals and weddings.



This is based on the theme of marriage. Kohbar is drawn in the nuptial chamber. Madhubani art also had a body painting style called Godna. This is considered by some to be in the Tantrik style.

The subjects include goddesses, scorpions, and snakes. The needle is dipped in goat milk and pricked on the body. The pricked points turn green.

In 1972, a German researcher Ericka Mozar came to India to do research on Mithila painting. She saw the beautiful Godna art and persuaded the Madhubani artist Chano Devi to do this painting on paper. In the Bharani style, colours are used, while in the Kachni style, 95% of the painting is done in black and the rest in the red.

Here, colours are not filled in the designs. Mostly, straight lines, slant lines and circles are used in the Kachni style.

Today, the younger generation has taken the art into different mediums like papier mache utility items, fabrics, and canvases.

Masks with Madhubani designs were sold like hot cakes during the corona pandemic. The railway station of Madhubani, the public buildings and the compound walls of cities like Patna are all filled with Madhubani paintings. The fame of these colourful and elegant paintings has spread far and wide.

(The author holds Masters both in Museology and Paintings. Currently she is Guest Lecturer at Sree Sankaracharya University of Sanskrit, Kalady.)

Knowledge Clusters: An Innovative Collaboration for a Better Tomorrow



The idea of Knowledge Clusters is to bring together different spheres of knowledge and technology for the sustained growth of a city or town. Often, the innovative ideas of academia stumble because of a lack of funding, impracticable governmental structures and incompatible collaboration between intellectuals.

On the other hand, the academia themselves could suffer from a lack of on-the-ground experience in understanding the socio-temporal problems of their surroundings.

Knowledge Clusters address this two-fold problem.

A Short Genesis

Dr. Arun Grover, the former Vice-Chancellor of Punjab University conceived the idea

of Knowledge Clusters. Chandigarh and Mohali have a large number of educational institutions, industries and Research and Development (R&D) centres.

Dr. Grover created a platform for the academia of these cities to work together to address the problems faced by the people.

The idea of having knowledge clusters/hubs has its genesis in the 'Narayan Murthy Report' of April 2012. The Planning Commission on Corporate Participation in Higher Education had commissioned it.

This also finds echoes in the 'Knowledge Commission Report' of the Government of India (GOI). Further, the idea of having alliances between institutions of higher education and research, in and around a city, also finds reference in the 12th Plan Document of GOI.



As of now, the PKC works on five verticals for projects and programmes namely environment, health, sustainable mobility, big data, artificial intelligence, and capacity building. **These preferences are drawn out of contextual analysis that isolated the problems of climate change, pandemics, and growing environmental degradation as the major concerns.**



This idea is also included in the 'Meta-University' concept. The Ministry of Human Resource Development, GOI, in its Rashtriya Uchchattar Shiksha Abhiyan document has also advocated it. Furthermore, the Science, Technology and Innovative 2013 policy of GOI refers to clusters/hubs as tools for innovations. The Sam Pitroda report has also underlined the development of excellence in the educational and research institutions facilitating innovation and knowledge clusters.

Keeping these ideas in mind, several rounds of meetings involving heads and/or their representatives have been held, including institutions of higher education and research in and around Chandigarh. In one of the meetings held on November 24, 2012, at Punjab University, it was agreed to name the knowledge clusters/hubs as Chandigarh Region Innovation and Knowledge Cluster (CRIKC).

Inspired by the progress made by CRIKC, the Principal Scientific Advisor to GOI, Prof. K. Vijayaraghavan set up Knowledge Clusters in Delhi, Hyderabad, Jodhpur, Pune, Bangalore and so on.

Contextual Application of Knowledge: The Model of PKC

Let us now take a concrete example of the Pune Knowledge Cluster (PKC) administered by the Inter-University Centre for Astronomy and Astrophysics.

The mission statement reads:

‘The PKC aims to bring together academia, R&D institutions and the industry of Pune and its surrounding areas, to address the challenging problems through innovative means, using scientific knowledge and engaging highly-skilled human resources. By innovatively connecting the unique and diverse academic/technical and sustainability experts, PKC aims to make Pune the national hub for knowledge-driven industries and a carbon-neutral city.

Furthermore, PKC aims to foster capacity building and promote skills development and entrepreneurship among the students and professionals of the city. However noble the idea, its translation and implementation requires cohesive and sustained efforts. To this end, the PKC brings together at least six spheres of institutions.

The first and most important one perhaps is the local bodies and public institutions such as Defence Institute of Advanced Technology, Maha Metro, Zilla Parishad, Pune Municipal Corporation, and Pune Smart City.

The second sphere is that of industries situated in and around Pune such as Tata Consultancy Services, Venture Centre, the Confederation of Indian Industry, and so on. The special case of Pune, which is known for its numerous military establishments, calls for a special collaboration with institutes



like the Army Medical Corps, Armed Forces Medical College, Pune Military Academy and so on.

The fourth sphere is that of governmental R&D institutes such as the Centre for Cellular & Molecular Biology, Centre for Materials for Electronics Technology, National Centre for Biological Sciences, National Chemical Laboratory, the Agarkar Research Institute and so on.



Science need not remain as the specialised field of an elite group. Rather it could be a means to solve our day-to-day hardships. **By employing science in our daily use, we inculcate the spirit of enquiry and achieve a scientific bend of mind!**



Fundamental to all these spheres is the fifth one which is the collaboration of educational institutions of various kinds. The PKC collaborates with almost all the academic institutes such as the B J Medical College, Indian Institute of Science, The Institute for Social and Economic Policy and Research, Maharashtra University for Health Sciences, Pune University and so forth.

The sixth sphere extends to other Knowledge Clusters in other cities.

As of now, the PKC works on five verticals for projects and programmes namely environment, health, sustainable mobility, big data, artificial intelligence, and capacity building. These preferences are drawn out of contextual analysis that isolated the problems of climate change, pandemics, and growing environmental degradation as the major concerns.

The first concrete implementation of this vision happened through the implementation of the fifth vertical namely capacity building. It got materialised through lectures and webinars, short courses, internships particularly focusing on the AI incubator, Citizen Science programme, and a set of senior-level programmes for bureaucrats, health care professionals, and agriculturalists.

The second project addressed a more pertinent issue: Covid 19. There were four major areas. The first sphere focused on data collection, processing, analysis and modelling. Experts of various disciplines worked on this level. Funded by Persistent Foundation, the PKC organised a serosurvey of 1664 individuals and has found that over 50% of the sample have developed antibodies. The survey was done in July, 2020 and it showed how acute the situation was then.

The third area of interest was in terms of SARS-CoV-2 surveillance, producing genome sequencing to tackle the virus more effectively. It also included retrospective sampling, prospective genomic surveillance, vaccine breakthrough and so on. Finally, the PKC could create a comprehensive database for Covid-19 and other infectious diseases.

As of August 3, 2021, the database contains the comprehensive details of over half a million patients in the Pune Metropolitan Area. Bereft of effective collaboration, geolocating the spread of the pandemic is super impossible and hence the need for PKC.

Apart from these apposite programmes, PKC also organises projects on Improving Urban Tree Cover using satellite mapping and machine learning, afforestation of degraded reserve forest land, town planning, sustainable mobility involving electric vehicles, and citizens science.

Citizens Science: The Science of Everybody!

Among all the programmes of PKC, this reaches out to the public to be active collaborators of scientific advancement. The idea is to encourage the public to be astronomers, physicists, biologists and inventors. Science need not remain as the specialised field of an elite group. Rather it could be a means to solve our day-to-day hardships. By employing science in our daily use, we inculcate the spirit of enquiry and achieve a scientific bend of mind!



A concrete instance of Citizens Science was in the field of astrophysics. The Pune-based Inter-University Centre for Astronomy and Astrophysics (IUCAA) has opened up its resources to the public to update, modify and, most importantly, to get it analysed and conclusions drawn from such data.

The astronomy aficionados and students have made some remarkable contributions in this respect. The project includes galaxy classifications, space observation, and identifying morphological features in galaxies. So far, over 100 people have contributed to astronomical data analysis and IUCAA has received over 15000 submissions for curation. Of these more than half of the contributors are from Kerala.

Citizens Science is a new charter of our nation's scientific progress. Here volunteers and scientists work together to gather real-world data and to solve some real-life problems. It not only helps science to get a grasp of vast amounts of data but also enables people to face their lives' struggles more scientifically. The outcome as PKC envisages is to create a better habitat for generations to come.

(Report prepared by Rosan Roy based on the invited talk delivered by Professor Ajit Kembavi, Professor Emeritus, Interuniversity Centre for Astronomy and Astrophysics (IUCAA), Pune, at the (Second) Prof. V. C. Kuriakose Memorial Workshop, held online on August 30, 2021)



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BOOK
REVIEW

Pax Lumina 2(5) / 2021 / 51-54



A Global Voice Calling Out for Peace

‘MAKING PEACE WITH FAITH: THE CHALLENGES OF RELIGION AND PEACEBUILDING’,

edited by Michelle Garred and Mohammed Abu-Nimer

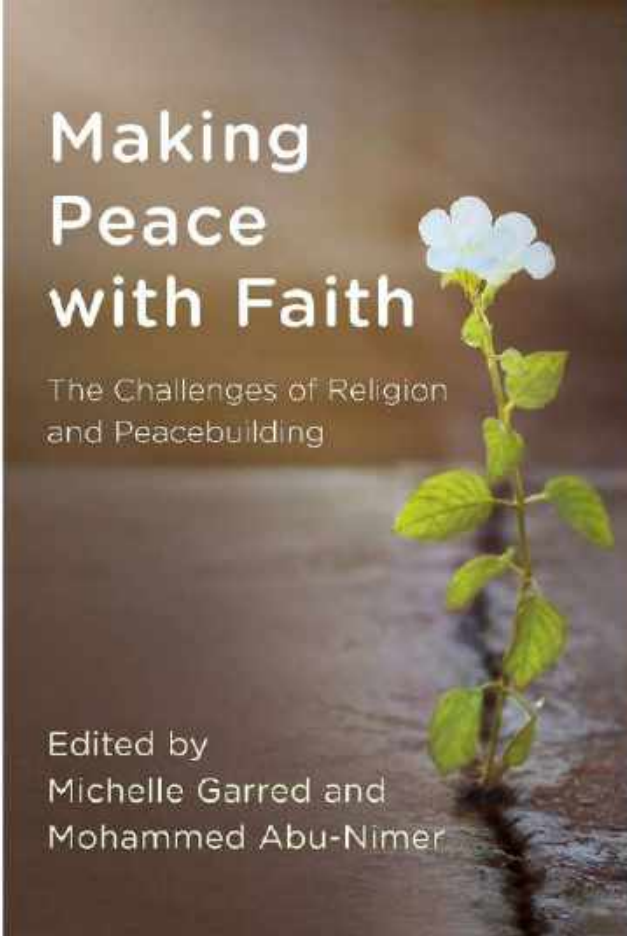
Peace and Faith have become the basic tenets of any social group complementing and contradicting each other and creating new possibilities and dismantling the older ones incessantly.

Religion with its hierarchical privileges has served as an enamoured institution wherein the masses can resort to unswerving solace. The conviction of people towards their religious dogma ushers faith in their peaceful traversing of lives amidst all the tempestuous tests of time. Unfortunately, the same beliefs, in their misinterpreted and extremist forms, have become a threat to humanity leading to the pursuit of violence and aggression.

The repercussions of such brutal menaces are engulfing nations, throwing them into the abyss of disillusionment and depriving them of their peaceful existence. The annals of human history are filled with bloodshed, wars and genocides. They call out for a collaborative institutional venture inculcating the flag bearers of peace to heal the world and make it a much better place.

Faith-based peace building is the need of the hour to deal with the delicacies of a world torn apart by distinctive belief systems.

The book, ‘Making Peace with Faith: The Challenges of Religion and Peacebuilding’, edited by Michelle Garred and Mohammed Abu-Nimer is a collection of different experiential personal narratives of faith-based peace-builders around the world.



The book is a compilation of the experiential knowledge gained by the practitioners of different faiths, through their daring interventions in many conflict areas, and posing innumerable challenges. This volume of peace-building stories was brought about by two eminent academicians with substantial professional expertise in conflict resolution and interreligious peace dialogues.

Michelle Garred is an applied peace researcher, founder and principal at Ripple-Peace Research & Consulting LLC that provides strategy, evaluation and learning services for the work of peace. She is an evaluator with two decades of excellence in counselling change-makers to act as effective forerunners of peace-building in conflict areas. As a competent facilitator, she is heralded for her expertise in integrating the roles of religion in conflict-management.

Mohammad Abu Nimer is a professor at the American University School of International Peace and Conflict Resolution in Washington DC. An expert in conflict resolution, he is also the Action Senior advisor to the King

Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz International Centre for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue.

This is an international organisation that specialises in interreligious and intercultural dialogue. Nimer has made decisive interventions in interreligious conflict resolution training and interfaith dialogues among various conflict-stricken communities. As an academic professional and expert practitioner of peace-building Nimer has led many conflict resolution workshops in Palestine, Israel, Egypt, Sri Lanka, Northern Ireland and the Philippines.

Nimer also serves on the boards of several organisations including the Editorial Board of the International Journal of Transitional Justice, the Governing Board of World Dialogue and Abraham's Vision.

In this volume, the chapters serve as a unique and valuable account based on the Muslim, Christian, Hindu, Jewish and Buddhist viewpoints encompassing different

geographical regions. The authors share their unique experiences of peace-building as practitioners, challenging questions of real-life situations which are entangled with different belief systems and extremist ideologies.


Each chapter comes up with a question which is a challenge to which the author responds from their lived narratives. These personal accounts rooted in faith and peace-building offer remarkable strategies driven from their faith that serve as a bedrock providing strength to become the forerunners of peace-building.

The chapters are rooted in concerns like convincing communities to cooperate with others, faith that inspires and strengthens their work, transforming the wrongdoers of one's community and faith tradition, remaining connected to one's faith while working with others, engaging policy makers of sensitive issues that involve religion, and dealing with people who endorse the use of violence to end -conflicts.


The term religion is used by the practitioners as a 'set of beliefs concerning the cause, nature and purpose of the universe... usually involving devotional and ritual observances'.

Faith is presented as belief in God or the conviction in the 'doctrines of religion'. Peace-building refers to the 'processes and activities involved in resolving violent conflict and establishing sustainable peace'. These activities may include 'dialogue, reconciliation, restorative justice, trauma healing, policy reform, or peace leadership training'.

The term incorporates activities that would bring people together and address the causes that underlie a conflict. A faith-based peace-builder is a person 'whose faith or religious experience motivates his or her work for peace'. They may be believers of a religion or even from a wide variety of secular positions.



In this volume, the chapters serve as a unique and valuable account based on the Muslim, Christian, Hindu, Jewish and Buddhist viewpoints encompassing different geographical regions. The authors share their unique experiences of peace-building as practitioners, challenging questions of real-life situations which are entangled with different belief systems and extremist ideologies.



The book comprises four thematic parts incorporating several points of view. Part One titled 'Engaging One's Own Faith' focuses on locating and grounding the author's faith traditions and potential resources in peace-building. The narratives of Eboo Patel and Rick Love deal with engaging the believers for interfaith fellowship and cooperation in the United States. Sushobha Barve comes up with a different perspective when wrongdoings take place in the same group, introspecting about one's community to take a just and unbiased position.

Part Two titled 'Engaging the Other' looks into the vulnerabilities of dealing with communities where one stands as the adversary of the other. Azhar Hussain explores the possibilities of a perceived adversary to promote tolerance and change in a traditional context. Yael Petretti puts forward faith-inspired compassionate

listening while dealing with extreme religious views, emphasising an open approach devoid of prejudices.

Maria Ida (Deng) Giguiento and Myla Leguro narrate the tales based in the Philippines where they worked as practitioners amidst those who endorse the use of violence as a means to resolve the conflicts with other groups.

Part Three titled 'Engaging Policy' brings together the questions of organisational and public policies in faith-based peace-building. Azza Karam tries to analyse the chances of engaging policymakers on sensitive religious issues, based on her experience in the United Nations.

Peter Dixon looks for ways in peace-building to remain rooted in one's faith while engaging and working with a community of different belief systems. Examining the contradicting aspects of faith and peace, Dishani Jayaweera, along with Nirosha De Silva, deals with the tendency of policymakers to introduce peace-building strategies in countering violent extremism.

The final part, 'Confronting Injustice and Trauma' looks into the chronicles of pain and suppression which also incorporates those perpetrated by religious institutions. The chapter by Johonna Turner looks for ways of dealing with the fear and traumatic expressions and also to support the needy ones with the potential resources of faith.

The final two chapters deal with the question of gender as Despina Namwembe from Uganda and India's Qutub Jahan Kidwai critically analyse the gender discrimination and sexual violence against women in their respective societies against the backdrop of differing belief systems.

Ruminations on various challenges posed by the authors speak out for an urgent need for individuals, communities and policymakers alike to work collaboratively for a better future. The narratives of these faith-based



These stories carry the potential of imparting new insights to faith-based peacebuilding in establishing a new world order ensuring sustainable peace. The world needs to embrace diversities and bring together humanity with an empathetic mindset, to understand, appreciate and respect the uniqueness of people and their beliefs.



peace-builders serve as a testimonial unfolding the intricacies of people and communities in conflict-stricken societies.

These stories carry the potential of imparting new insights to faith-based peacebuilding in establishing a new world order ensuring sustainable peace. The world needs to embrace diversities and bring together humanity with an empathetic mindset, to understand, appreciate and respect the uniqueness of people and their beliefs.

As one of the chapters acknowledges Martin Luther King Jr., 'the ultimate tragedy is not the glaring noisiness of the bad people, but the appalling silence of the good people'.

The book becomes a global voice, calling out for peaceful sustenance and survival, which is still a distant dream of many.

(The author is a Research Scholar in English, University of Kerala)



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Pax Lumina 2(5) / 2021 / 55



Dear Editor,

Congratulations to all at Pax Lumina for the July 2021 issue on Fr Stan Swamy. It is, indeed, a collectors' item which will be a source of inspiration to many. Keep up the good work.

Cedric Prakash

Ahmadabad

Dear Editor,

The July issue of Pax Lumina covered effectively the touching story of Fr Stan Swamy and the burning issues of pandemic and peace.

The articles on Fr Stan bring out how there was a failure of justice in the events leading to the death of someone who stood and lived for protection of tribals, defence of undertrials and also communal harmony. Let the courage and fortitude of Fr Stan inspire readers to the higher realms of light, hope and love! The stories of societies and individuals to save humanity from hunger and misery in the face of pandemic too are truly inspiring. The article OXYGEN THERAPY BANE OR BOON is indeed a thought-provoking one.

Truly,

KA Joseph

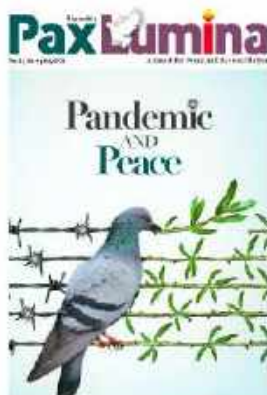
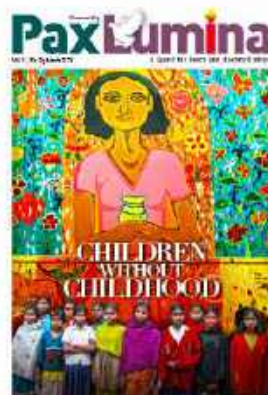
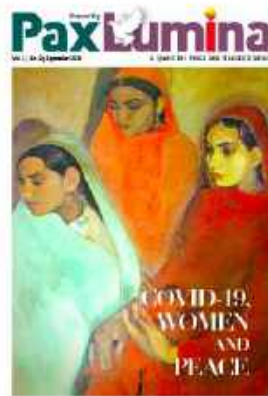
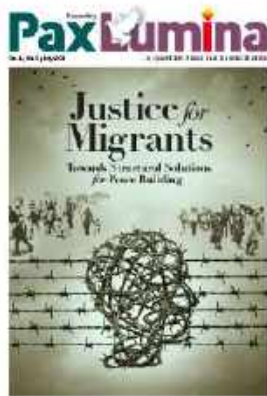
Kochi

Dear Editor,

A quote in one of the articles of the July issue read, "At times in life, not taking a risk can be riskier." The month of July started on a heart-aching note as we heard of the passing of Fr Stan Swamy. All articles beautifully covered his life and works and this quote befits him perfectly as he was a risk-taker, an ambassador for peace. What also caught my attention was the photo on the second page - a man sailing on a mask. It is a matter to think about, as the second wave gradually flattens, are we inviting or fuelling an unseen plastic/mask pollution crisis? Highly appreciate the effort in formulating such diverse articles on Pandemic and Peace.

Leanne D'Mello

Mumbai





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